

*A 5/5 to 0*  
*(2/5)*

A  
T O U R  
THROUGH  
SICILY and MALTA.

IN A  
SERIES OF LETTERS  
TO  
WILLIAM BECKFORD, Esq.  
OF SOMERLY IN SUFFOLK;

FROM  
P. BRYDONE, F. R. S.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



---

D U B L I N :

Printed for J. POTTS, in DAME-STREET, and  
R. MONCRIEFFE, in CAPEL-STREET.

M,DCC,LXXIII.

*203. f. 387.*



15 . 6 man in boat  
1 . 4 . for myself

1 . 19 = 7 . 2 breakfast 1 lb  
2 dinner  
2 breakfast 1 lb

15 . 6

1 . 1 . bid at Sullamere

0 . 16 . 7

## Advertisement.

**H**AD there been any book in our language on the subject of the following Letters, they never should have seen the light. The Author wrote them for the amusement of his friends, and as an assistance to his memory; and if it will in any degree apologize for their imperfections, he can with truth declare that they never were intended for publication: Nor indeed was that idea suggested to him, till long after they were written. One principal motive he will own, was the desire of giving to the world, and perhaps of transmitting to posterity, a monument of his friendship with the gentleman to whom they are addressed.

When Mr. Forster's translation of Baron Riefdel's book first appeared, these Letters were already in the press, and the Author apprehended an anticipation of his subject; however, on perusal, he had the satisfaction to find, that the two works did not much interfere.

In transcribing them for the press, he found it necessary both to retrench and to amplify; by which the ease of the epistolary stile has probably suffered, and some of the letters have been extended much beyond their original length.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

He now presents them to the Public with the greatest diffidence ; hoping that some allowance will be made for the very inconvenient circumstances, little favourable to order or precision, in which many of them were written ; But he would not venture to new-model them ; apprehending, that what they might gain in form and expression, they would probably lose in ease and simplicity ; and well knowing that the original impressions are better described at the moment they are felt, than from the most exact recollection.

CON-



# C O N T E N T S

## O F T H E

### F I R S T V O L U M E.

#### L E T T E R I.

*C* LIMATE of Naples—Compared with that of Rome.—Sirocco wind—Antidote against its effects.—Coast of Baia, &c.

#### L E T T E R II. p. 9.

*Voyage from Naples to Messina—Bay of Naples.—Lipari islands.—Strombolo.—Scylla.—Calabria, &c.*

#### L E T T E R III. p. 25.

*Harbour of Messina—Charybdis—Gallies.—Visit to a convent.—Feast of St. Francis.—Advantages of Messina for valetudinarians.*

#### L E T T E R IV. p. 35.

*Sicilian banditti.—A famous diver.—Charybdis.—Feast of the Vara.—Singular phenomenon.*

#### L E T T E R V. p. 48.

*Journey to Taurominum.—Coast of Sicily—Nebrodes.—Theatre of Taurominum.—Naumachia.—Reservoirs, &c.*

#### L E T T E R VI. p. 53.

*Journey to Jaci—Mount Ætna—Piedmonte—Small volcanos.—Torrent of boiling water.—Great chestnut trees.—Age of the lava.—River of Acis.*

#### L E T T E R VII. p. 65.

*Journey from Jaci to Catania.—Coast formed of lava.—Conflict betwixt the fire and water.—Harbour of lava.—St. Agatha's veil—Its power over Mount Ætna.—Great antiquity of the eruptions of this mountain.*

#### L E T T E R VIII. p. 69.

*Prince of Biscaris—His museum.—Convent of Benedictines.—Lava run over the walls of Catania.—Antiquity of this city.—Revenue of the bishop raised from the sale of the snow of Ætna.—Earthquake 1693.—Antiquities.—Elephant of lava.—Heathen temple converted into a church.—Resemblance of the Catholic to the Pagan*

## CONTENTS.

*Pagan rites.—Saints disgraced.—Devotion of the Catholics.—Preparations for ascending Mount Ætna.*

### LETTER IX. p. 80.

*Journey up Mount Ætna.—Three regions of the mountain.—common progress of an eruption.—Mountains formed on Ætna.—Difference of Ætna and Vesuvius.—Fate of the country near Hybla.—Monpelieri.—Celebrated statues covered by the lava.—Eruption of 1669.—Dreadful effects of the lava.—Singular fate of a vineyard. Mouth from whence this eruption issued.—A cavern.—Wildness of the inhabitants of Ætna.—Conversation with them.—La Regione Sylvosa.—La Spelonca dal Capriole.—View of the setting sun.—Pass the night in a cavern.—Eruption of 1766.—Lava not yet cold—Its vast depth.*

### LETTER X. p. 93.

*Continuation of the Journey up Mount Ætna—Difficulties attending it.—Torre del Filosofo—Distinctness of vision.—Conical mountain.—Summit of Ætna.—Prospect from it.—Regions of the mountain.—Crater.—Reflections. Descent from Ætna.*

### LETTER XI. p. 106.

*Mensuration of heights by the barometer—Not reduced to a certainty.—Supposed height of Ætna.—Magnetical needle agitated on the mountain.—Electricity of the air near volcanos.—Singular effects of electricity.—Lightning from the smoke of Ætna.—Variety of waters on the mountain.—Subterraneous river.—Periodical and poisonous springs.—Caverns.—Plants and flowers of Ætna.—Wild beasts.—Horses.—Cattle.—Crater falls in every century.—Anfinomus and Anapias, their filial piety.—Earthquake 1169.—Eruption 1669.—Poetical Descriptions of Ætna.*

### LETTER XII. p. 130.

*Voyage from Catania to Syracuse.—Coast formed by Mount Ætna.—Homer takes no notice of this mountain.—Virgil lands his hero at the foot of it.—View of the mountain from the sea.—Circumference of Ætna.—River Simetus.—*



## CONTENTS.

*Simetus.---Amber found near its mouth.---Lakes of Beviere and Pontana.---Leontine fields.---Augusta.---Syracuse.---Remains of antiquity.---Latomie.---Ear of Dionysius.---Amphitheatre.---Catacombs.---Temples.---Ortigia.---Fortification.---Fountain of Arethusa.---Fictions concerning it.---Alpheus.---Harbours of Syracuse.---Archimedes.---His burning glasses.---Magnificence of the antient Syracuse.---Poverty of the modern.*

### LETTER XIII. p. 148.

*Voyage to Pachinus or Capo Passero.---Maltese sparos.---Method of rowing them.---A hurricane.---Capo Passero.---Barrenness of the country.---Danger of this coast.---Method of avoiding it.*

### LETTER XIV. p. 155.

*Sulphureous lake.---Serpent.---Voyage to Malta.*

### LETTER XV. p. 159.

*Malta.---Its productions.---Corn.---Cotton.---Oranges.---Industry of the Maltese.---Departure of a Maltese fleet.---Harbour of Malta.---Fortifications.---Public buildings.---Church of St. John.---Conspiracy of the Turkish slaves.*

### LETTER XVI. p. 166.

*Antient city of Melita.---Catacombs.---Bosquetta.---Statue and grotto of St. Paul.---Miraculous property.---Grand master.---His power.---Land force of the island.---Sea force.---Singular piece of ordnance.---Police.---Duelling.---Punishment of a knight.---Remarkable storm.---Horse races.---Malta an epitome of Europe.---Its connection with Sicily.*

### LETTER XVII. p. 177.

*Sail for Agrigentum.---Island of Gozzo.---Coast of Sicily. American aloes.---City of Agrigentum.*

### LETTER XVIII. p. 181.

*Antiquities of Agrigentum.---Temples of Venus.---Of Concord.---Of Hercules.---Of Jupiter Olympus, &c.---Celebrated picture of Zeuxis.---Statue of Apollo.---Catacombs and sepulchres.---Mountain of Agrigentum.*

LET-



## CONTENTS.

### LETTER XIX. p. 185.

*Luxury of the antient Agrigentini.---Hospitality.---Anecdote.---Humanity and gratitude to their horses.---Agrigentum long subject to tyrants.---Phalaris, anecdote of him.---Melanippus and Cariton, their friendship.---Death of Phalaris.*

---

## CONTENTS

OF THE

## SECOND VOLUME.

### LETTER XVIII. p. 193.

*Country round Agrigentum.---A feast.---Hospitality of the Agrigentini.---Their character.---The bishop.---Departure for Trapani.---Sea storm.---Driven back to Agrigentum.---Journey by land to Palermo.---Richness and beauty of the country.---Poverty and oppression of the peasants.*

### LETTER XIX. p. 205.

*Conclusion of the journey to Palermo.---Contrast betwixt Sicily and Switzerland.---Inns, &c.*

### LETTER XX. p. 211.

*City of Palermo.---Marino.---Conversations where held.---Sicilian ladies.---Reflections.*

### LETTER XXI. p. 217.

*The viceroy.---His table.---Nobility.---Their temperance.*

### LETTER XXII. p. 221.

*Bagaria.---Palace of the Prince Patagonia.*

### LETTER XXIII. p. 226.

*Sirocco wind.---Convent of Capuchins.---Their burial place.---Method of preserving the dead.---Anecdote.---Address of a Sicilian servant.*

### LETTER XXIV. p. 242.

*Account of a comet.---Reflections.*

LET-

## CONTENTS.

### LETTER XXV. p. 256.

*Cathedral of Palermo.—Jesuits church.—Cathedral of Monreale.—The archbishop.—Preparations for a festival.—Superstition of the people.*

### LETTER XXVI. p. 261.

*St. Rosalia.—Subject of an epic poem.—Some account of her.—St. Viar.—Reflections.*

### LETTER XXVII. p. 266.

*Sirocco wind.—Review of a Swiss regiment.—Entertainment.—Difference of education here and on the continent.—Prince of Resuttana.*

### LETTER XXVIII. p. 275.

*Feast of St. Rosalia.*

### LETTER XXIX. p. 289.

*Antiquities.—Camesena.—Temple of Ceres at Enna.—Temple of Venus Erecina.—Difference of Homer and Virgil in their accounts of Sicily.*

### LETTER XXX. p. 296.

*Monte Pelegrino.—St. Rosalia.—Antient fortrefs.—Situation of Palermo.—Antiquity of that city.—Inscriptions.*

### LETTER XXXI. p. 305.

*Utility of ices in a hot climate.—Sicilian fisheries.—The Tunny-fish.—The Pesce Spada, or Sword-fish.—Method of fishing in the night.—Coral fishing.—Oppression of the government.—Foundation of the feudal system in Sicily.—Parliament.—Inquisition.—Power of the viceroy.—Military force.—Bandiere men.*

### LETTER XXXII. p. 316.

*Sicilian titles.—Luxury of the Sicilians in their carriages.—Ridiculous prejudice.*

### LETTER XXXIII. p. 320.

*Sicilians animated in conversation.—Marriage ceremonies.—Beauty of the ladies.—Anecdote.—Poetry the universal passion of the Sicilians.*

### LETTER XXXIV. p. 325.

*The opera.—Gabrieli, her wonderful performance.—Her caprice.—Ballet of the opera.—English characters taken*



## C O N T E N T S.

*taken off.—Enmity betwixt the Sicilians and Neapolitans.*

### L E T T E R XXXV. p. 334.

*Remarkable springs in Sicily.—Sulphureous baths.—Springs of warm water in the sea.—Gigantic bones.—Crops of wheat.—Method of preserving their grain.—Commodities of Sicily.—Soda.—Wild honey.—Sugar.—Liquorice.—Oranges.—Pistachio nuts.—Manna.—Cantbarides.—Marbles.—Pietra Saponaro—Mushroom stone.—Mount Ætna.—Advantages resulting from it.*

### L E T T E R XXXVI. p. 340.

*Return to Naples.*

A T O U R



---

A  
T O U R  
T H R O U G H  
S I C I L Y   A N D   M A L T A.

---

L E T T E R   I.

DEAR BECKFORD,

Naples, May 14, 1770.

**I** Remember to have heard you regret, that in all your peregrinations through Europe, you had ever neglected the island of Sicily; and had spent much of your time in running over the old beaten track, and in examining the thread-bare subjects of Italy and France; when probably there are a variety of objects, not less interesting, that still lie buried in oblivion, in that celebrated island. We intend to profit from this hint of yours.—Fullarton has been urging me to it with all that ardour, which a new prospect of acquiring knowledge ever inspires in him; and Glover, your old acquaintance, has promised to accompany us.

The Italians represent it as impossible: as there are no inns in the island, and many of the roads are over dangerous precipices, or through bogs and fo-

rests, that are infested by the most resolute and daring banditti in Europe. However, all these considerations, formidable as they may appear, did not deter Mr. Hamilton \*, his lady, and Lord Fortrose †. They made this expedition last summer ; and returned so much delighted with it, that they have animated us with the strongest desire of enjoying the same pleasure.

Our first plan was to go by land to Regium, and from thence, cross over to Messina ; but on making exact enquiry, with regard to the state of the country, and method of travelling, we find that the danger from the banditti of Calabria and Apulia is so great, the accommodations so wretched, and inconveniences of every kind so numerous, without any consideration whatever to throw into the opposite scale, that we soon relinquished this scheme ; and in spite of all the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis, and the more real terrors of sea sickness (the most formidable monster of the three) we have determined to go by water : And, that no time may be lost, we have already taken our passage on board an English ship, which is ready to sail by the first fair wind.

Now, as this little expedition has never been considered as any part of the grand tour ; and as it will probably present many objects worthy of your attention, that are not mentioned in any of our books of travels, I flatter myself that a short account of these will not be unacceptable to you ; and may in some degree make up for your having neglected to visit them. You may therefore expect to hear of me, from every town where we stop ; and when I meet with any thing deserving of notice, I shall attempt to describe it in as few words as possible. We have been waiting with impatience for a fair wind, but at present there is little prospect of it. The weather is

\* Now knight of the Bath.

† Now Earl of Seaforth.



exceedingly rough, and not a ship has been able to get out of the harbour for upwards of three weeks past. This climate is by no means what we expected to find it; and the serene sky of Italy, so much boasted of by our travelled gentlemen, does not altogether deserve the great eulogiums bestowed upon it. It is now the middle of May, and we have not as yet had any continuance of what may be called fine weather. It has, indeed, been abundantly warm, but seldom a day has passed without sudden storms of wind and rain, which renders walking out here to the full as dangerous to our invalids, as it is in England.

I am persuaded that our medical people are under great mistakes with regard to this climate. It is certainly one of the warmest in Italy; but it is as certainly one of the most inconstant; and from what we have observed, generally disagrees with the greatest part of our valetudinarians; but more particularly with the gouty people, who all found themselves better at Rome; which, though much colder in winter, is, I believe a healthier climate. Naples to be sure is more eligible in summer, as the air is constantly refreshed by the sea breeze, when Rome is often scorched by the most insupportable heat. Last summer, Fahrenheit's thermometer never rose higher at Naples than 76. At Rome it was 89. The difference is often still more considerable. In winter it is not less remarkable. Here, our greatest degree of cold was in the end of January; the thermometer stood at 36; at Rome it fell to 27; so that the distance of the two extremes of heat and cold last year at Naples, was only 40 degrees; whereas at Rome it was no less than 62. Yet, by all accounts their winter was much more agreeable and healthy than ours: For they had clear frosty weather, whilst we were deluged with perpetual rains, accompanied with exceeding high wind. The people here assure us,



that in some seasons it has rained constantly every day for six or seven weeks. But the most disagreeable part of the Neapolitan climate is the *sirocco* or south-east wind, which is very common at this season of the year : It is infinitely more relaxing, and gives the vapours in a much stronger degree, than the worst of our rainy Novembers. It has now blown for these seven days without intermission ; and has indeed blown away all our gaiety and spirits ; and if it continues much longer, I do not know what may be the consequence. It gives a degree of lassitude, both to the body and mind, that renders them absolutely incapable of performing their usual functions. It is not very surprizing, that it should produce these effects on a phlegmatic English constitution ; but we have just now an instance, that all the mercury of France must sink under the load of this horrid, leaden atmosphere. A smart Parisian marquis came here about ten days ago : He was so full of animal spirits that the people thought him mad. He never remained a moment in the same place ; but, at their grave conversations, he used to skip about from room to room with such amazing elasticity, that the Italians swore he had got springs in his shoes. I met him this morning, walking with the step of a philosopher ; a smelling bottle in his hand, and all his vivacity extinguished. I asked what was the matter ? “ Ah ! mon ami,” said he, “ je m’ennui à la mort ; —moi, qui n’ai jamais sçu l’ennui. Mais cet excrable vent m’accable ; et deux jours de plus, et je me pend.”

The natives themselves do not suffer less than strangers ; and all nature seems to languish during this abominable wind. A Neapolitan lover avoids his mistress with the utmost care in the time of the *sirocco*, and the indolence it inspires, is almost sufficient to extinguish every passion. All works of genius are laid aside, during its continuance ; —and when any thing  
very

very flat or insipid is produced, the strongest phrase of disapprobation they can bestow is, "Era scritto" "in tempo del firocco;" that it was writ in the time of the firocco. I shall make no other apology for this letter;—and whenever I happen to tire you, be kind enough to remember (pray do) that it is not me you are to blame, but the firocco wind. This will put me much at my ease, and will save us a world of time in apologies.

I have been endeavouring to get some account of this very singular wind, but the people here never think of accounting for any thing; and I do not find, notwithstanding its remarkable effects, that it has ever yet been an object of enquiry amongst them. I applied to a celebrated physician (who, from talking a jargon of his own, has attained to a degree of reputation, of which we found him extremely unworthy.) He told me, he had discovered that it was owing to a certain occult quality in the air, which hardly any body knew except himself; that, as for the rest, they e'en let it blow, and never thought more about the matter—Here he burst out into a loud laugh; and this is positively all that I could make out of him.

I have not observed that the firocco makes any remarkable change in the barometer. When it first set in, the mercury fell about a line and a half; and has continued much about the same height ever since; but the thermometer was at 43 the morning it began, and rose almost immediately to 65; and for these two days past it has been at 70 and 71. However, it is certainly not the warmth of this wind, that renders it so oppressive to the spirits; it is rather the want of that genial quality, which is so enlivening, and which ever renders the western breeze so agreeable: The spring and elasticity of the air seems to be lost; and that active principle that animates all nature, appears to be dead. This principle we have sometimes supposed to be nothing else than the subtle



## 6 A TOUR THROUGH

electric fluid that the air usually contains ; and indeed, we have found, that during this wind, it appears to be almost totally annihilated, or at least, its activity is exceedingly reduced. Yesterday, and to-day, we have been attempting to make some electrical experiments ; but I never before found the air so extremely unfavourable for them.

Sea-bathing we have ever found to be the best antidote against the effects of the sirocco ; and this we certainly enjoy in the greatest possible perfection. Lord Fortrose, who is the soul of our colony here, has provided a large commodious boat for this purpose. We meet every morning at eight o'clock, and row about half a mile out to sea, where we strip and dash into the water :—Were it not for this, we should all of us have been as bad as the French marquis. My lord has ten watermen, who are in reality a sort of amphibious animals, as they live one half the summer in the sea. Three or four of these generally go in with us, to pick up stragglers, and secure us from all accidents : They dive at ease to the depth of forty, and sometimes of fifty feet ; and bring up quantities of excellent shell-fish during the summer months ; but so great is their devotion, that every time they dive they make the sign of the cross, and mutter an Ave Maria, without which they think they should certainly be drowned ; and were not a little scandalized at us for omitting this ceremony. To accustom us to swimming in all circumstances, my lord has provided a suit of clothes, which we wear by turns ; and from a very short practice, we have found it almost as commodious to swim with as without them ; we have likewise learned to strip in the water, and find it no very difficult matter : And I am fully persuaded, from being accustomed to this kind of exercise, that in case of shipwreck we should have greatly the advantage over those who had never practised



practised it; for it is by the embarrassment from the clothes, and the agitation that people are thrown into, from finding themselves in a situation they had never experienced before, that so many lives are lost.

After bathing, we have an English breakfast at his lordship's; and after breakfast, a delightful little concert, which lasts for an hour and a half. Barbella, the sweetest fiddle in Italy, leads our little band. This party, I think, constitutes one principal part of the pleasure we enjoy at Naples. We have likewise some very agreeable society amongst ourselves, though we cannot boast much of that with the inhabitants. There are to be sure some good people amongst them; but in general there is so very little analogy betwixt an English and a Neapolitan mind, that the true social harmony, that great sweetener of human life; never can be produced. In lieu of this, (the exchange you will say is but a bad one) the country round Naples abounds so much in every thing that is curious, both in art and nature, and affords so ample a field of speculation for the naturalist and antiquary, that a person of any curiosity may spend some months here very agreeably, and not without profit.

Besides the great discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeia, which, of themselves, afford a vast fund of entertainment, the whole coast that surrounds this beautiful bay, particularly that near Puzzoli, Cuma, Misenum and Baia, is covered over with innumerable monuments of Roman magnificence. But, alas! how are the mighty fallen! This delightful coast, that was once the garden of all Italy, and inhabited only by the rich, the gay, and luxurious, is now abandoned to the poorest and most miserable of mortals. Perhaps, there is no spot on the globe, that has undergone so perfect a change; or that can exhibit so striking a picture of the vanity of human grandeur.

deur. Those very walls that once lodged a Cæsar, a Lucullus, an Anthony, the richest and most voluptuous of mankind; are now occupied by the very meanest and most indigent wretches on earth, who are actually starving for want in those very apartments that were the scenes of the most unheard-of luxury; where we are told that suppers were frequently given, that cost fifty thousand pounds; and some, that even amounted to double that sum: A degree of magnificence that we have now difficulty to form any idea of. The luxury indeed of Baia was so great, that it became a proverb, even amongst the luxurious Romans themselves. And, at Rome, we often find them upbraiding with effeminacy and epicurism those who spent much of their time in this scene of delights;—Clodius throws it in Cicero's teeth more than once: And that orator's having purchased a villa here, hurt him not a little in the opinion of the graver and more austere part of the senate. The walls of these palaces still remain; and the poor peasants, in some places, have built up their miserable huts within them; but, at present, there is not one gentleman or man of fashion that resides in any part of this country; the former state of which, compared with the present, certainly makes the most striking contrast imaginable. Yesterday we rode over the greatest part of it a shooting porcupines, a new species of diversion, which I had never heard of before. We killed several of these animals on the Monte Barbara, the place that formerly produced the Falernian wine, but now a barren waste. I don't know if you are acquainted with this kind of sport. To me, I own, its novelty was its greatest merit; and I would not at any time give a day of partridge for a month of porcupine shooting. Neither indeed is the flesh of these animals the most delicious in the world, though to-day most of us have dined upon it. It is extremely luscious, and soon palls upon the appetite.

We



## SICILY AND MALTA. 9

—We are now going to lay in our sea-store, as there is some probability that we shall sail in a day or two. —Farewell—you shall hear from me again at Messina, if we are not swallowed up by Charybdis.

Ever your's,

P. B.

## LETTER II.

On board the Charming Molly, off the  
Island of Caprè, May 15.

**W**E have now begun our expedition with every auspicious omen. This morning the melancholy sirocco left us; and in place of it we have got a fine brisk tramontane (or North wind), which in a few hours blew away all our vapours, and made us wonder how much the happiness of mankind depends on a blast of wind. After eating a hearty dinner with many of our friends at Mr. Walter's, and drinking plentifully of his excellent burgundy, we took leave in the highest spirits.—Had the sirocco blown as yesterday, we should probably have been in tears; and not one of us would have suspected that we were crying, only because the wind was south. We are not apt to suppose it; but probably a great part of our pleasures and pains depend upon such trivial causes, though always ascribed to something else;—few people being willing to own themselves like a weathercock, affected by every blast. Indeed we should have naturally imputed it to the grief of parting with that excellent and worthy family whom you know so well; which no person could ever leave without regret, or see without pleasure; but the agreeable prospect of soon meeting again, (probably better qualified to amuse and entertain them) absorbed all melancholy thoughts; and even added to that alacrity, which the delightful tour before us had already inspired.

We

We sailed at five ; and after firing our farewell signals to our friends on shore, (whom we discovered with our glasses at some miles distance) we soon found ourselves in the middle of the bay of Naples, surrounded by the most beautiful scenery in the world. It fell calm for an hour, on purpose to give us time to contemplate all its beauties.

The bay is of a circular figure ; in most places upwards of 20 miles in diameter ; so that including all its breaks and inequalities, the circumference is considerably more than 60 miles. The whole of this space is so wonderfully diversified, by all the riches both of art and nature, that there is scarce an object wanting to render the scene compleat ; and it is hard to say, whether the view is more pleasing from the singularity of many of these objects, or from the incredible variety of the whole. You see an amazing mixture of the antient and modern ; some rising to fame, and some sinking to ruin. — Palaces reared over the tops of other palaces, and antient magnificence trampled under foot — by modern folly. — Mountains and islands, that were celebrated for their fertility, changed into barren wastes ; and barren wastes into fertile fields and rich vineyards. Mountains sunk into plains, and plains swelled into mountains. Lakes drank up by volcanos, and extinguished volcanos turned into lakes. The earth still smoaking in many places ; and in others throwing out flame. — In short, nature seems to have formed this coast in her most capricious mood ; for every object is a *lufus naturæ*. She never seems to have gone seriously to work ; but has devoted this spot to the most unlimited indulgence of caprice and frolick.

The bay is shut out from the Mediterranean by the island of Caprè, so famous for the abode of Augustus ; and afterwards so infamous for that of Tiberius. A little to the west lie those of Ischia, Procida, and Nisida ; the celebrated promontory of Misenum,



num, where Æneas landed ; the classic fields of Baia, Cuma, and Puzzoli ; with all the variety of scenery that formed both the Tartarus and Elysium of the antients ; the Campi Phlegrei, or burning plains where Jupiter overcame the giants ; the Monte Novo, formed of late years by fire ; the Monte Barbara ; the picturesque city of Puzzoli, with the Solfaterra smoking above it ;—the beautiful promontory of Paullippe, exhibiting the finest scenery that can be imagined ; the great and opulent city of Naples, with its three castles, its harbour full of ships from every nation, its palaces, churches, and convents innumerable. The rich country from thence to Potici, covered with noble houses and gardens, and appearing only a continuation of the city. The palace of the king, with many others surrounding it, all built over the roofs of those of Herculaneum, buried near a hundred feet, by the eruptions of Vesuvius. The black fields of lava that have run from that mountain intermixed with gardens, vineyards, and orchards. Vesuvius itself, in the back ground of the scene, discharging volumes of fire and smok, and forming a broad track in the air over our heads, extending without being broken or dissipated to the utmost verge of the horizon. A variety of beautiful towns and villages, round the base of the mountain, thoughtless of the impending ruin that daily threatens them. Some of these are reared over the very roofs of Pompeia and Stabia, where Pliny perished ; and with their foundations have pierced through the sacred abodes of the antient Romans ;—thousands of whom lie buried here, the victims of this inexorable mountain. Next follows the extensive and romantic coast of Castello Mare, Sorrentum, and Mola ; diversified with every picturesque object in nature. It was the study of this wild and beautiful country that formed our greatest landscape-painters. This was the school of Poussin and Salvator Rosa, but most particularly of

of the last, who composed many of his most celebrated pieces from the bold craggy rocks that surround this coast; and no doubt it was from the daily contemplation of these romantic objects, that they stored their minds with that variety of ideas they have communicated to the world with such elegance in their paintings.

Now, should I tell you that this immense coast, this prodigious variety of mountains, vallies, promontories and islands, covered over with an everlasting verdure, and loaded with the richest fruits, is all the produce of subterraneous fire; it would require, I am afraid, too great a stretch of faith to believe me; yet the fact is certain and can only be doubted by those who have wanted time or curiosity to examine it. It is strange, you will say, that nature should make use of the same agent to create as to destroy; and that what has only been looked upon as the consumer of countries, is in fact the very power that produces them.—Indeed, this part of our earth seems already to have undergone the sentence pronounced upon the whole of it: But, like the phoenix, has risen again from its own ashes, in much greater beauty and splendour than before it was consumed. The traces of these dreadful conflagrations are still conspicuous in every corner; they have been violent in their operations, but in the end have proved salutary in their effects. The fire in many places is not extinguished, but Vesuvius is now the only spot where it rages with any degree of activity.

Mr. Hamilton, our minister here, who is no less distinguished in the learned, than in the polite world, has lately examined it with a truly philosophic eye, and this is the result of all his observations; however, at present, I only sit down to give you an account of the prospect of this singular country, and not to write its natural history; which would lead me into too vast a field: I shall reserve that curious subject  
till



till our return, when I shall have more leisure to make you acquainted with it.—I beg therefore you will at least suspend your judgment for the present, and do not condemn me before I am heard.

After contemplating this delightful prospect, till sun-set, the wind sprung up again, and we have now almost reached Caprè (30 miles from Naples.) We have just spoke with an English ship. They tell us that the Marquis of Carmarthen, Lord Fortrose, and Mr. Hamilton, observing the calm, took a boat to make us a visit; but unfortunately mistaking their vessel for ours, we have had the mortification to miss them.

The night is very dark; and mount Vesuvius is flaming at a dreadful rate: We can observe the red-hot stones thrown to a vast height in the air; and, after their fall, rolling down the side of the mountain. Our ship is going so smooth, that we are scarce sensible of the motion; and if this wind continue, before to-morrow night we shall be in sight of Sicily. Adieu. The captain is making a bowl of grog, and promising us a happy voyage.

16th. All wrong—Sick to death.—Execrable firecco wind, and exactly contrary.—Vile heaving waves—A plague of all sea voyages.—That author was surely right, who said that *land voyages* \* were much to be preferred.

17th in the morning. For these 24 hours past we have been groaning to one another from our beds; execrating the waves, and wishing that we had rather been at the mercy of all the banditti of Calabria. We are now beginning to change our tune. The firecco is gone, and the wind is considerably fallen; however we are still three woeful figures. Our servants too are as sick and as helpless as we. The captain says, that Philip, our Sicilian man, was frightened out of his wits, and has been praying to St. Januarius with all his might. He now thinks he

\* See Lord Baltimore's *Tour to the East*.

has heard him, and imputes the change of the weather entirely to his interest with his faint.

17th. Three o'clock. Weather pleasant and favourable—A fine breeze since ten;—have just come in sight of Strombolo.—Our pilot says it is near 20 leagues off. We have likewise a view of the mountains of Calabria, but at a very great distance.—Ship steady; and sea sickness almost gone.

Eleven at night. The weather is now fine, and we are all well. After spying Strombolo, by degrees we came in sight of the rest of the Lipari islands, and part of the coast of Sicily. These islands are very picturesque, and several of them still emit smoke, particularly Volcano and Volcanello; but none of them, for some ages past, except Strombolo, have made any eruptions of fire. We are just now lying within about three miles of that curious island, and can see its operations distinctly. It appears to be a volcano of a very different nature from Vesuvius, the explosions of which succeed one another with some degree of regularity, and have no great variety of duration. Now I have been observing Strombolo, ever since it fell dark, with a good deal of pleasure, and likewise with some degree of perplexity, as I cannot account for its variety. Sometimes its explosions exactly resemble those of Vesuvius, and the light seems only to be occasioned by the quantity of fiery stones thrown into the air; and so soon as these have fallen down, it appears to be entirely extinguished, till another explosion causes a fresh illumination: This I have observed ever to be the case with Vesuvius; except when the lava has risen to the summit of the mountain, and continued without variety to illuminate the air around it.—The light from Strombolo evidently depends on some other cause. Sometimes, a clear, red flame, issues from the crater of the mountain, and continues to blaze without interruption for near the space of half an hour. The fire is of a different colour



colour from the explosions of stones, and is evidently produced from a different cause. It would appear as if some inflammable substance were suddenly kindled up in the bowels the of mountain. It is attended with no noise or explosion that we are sensible of. It has now fallen calm, and we shall probably have an opportunity of examining this volcano more minutely to-morrow. We were told at Naples that it had lately made a very violent eruption, and had begun to form a new island at some little distance from the old, which indeed was one of our great inducements to this expedition. We think we have discovered this island, as we observed several times the appearance of a small flame arising out of the sea, a little to the south-west of Strombolo; and suppose that probably it must have issued from this newly formed island; however, it is possible that this light may come from the lower part of the island of Strombolo itself. We shall see to-morrow.

18th. We are still off Strombolo, but unfortunately the island intercepts the view of that spot from whence we observed the flame to arise, and at present, we can see no appearance of any new island, nor indeed of any lava that has of late sprung from the old one. We have a most distinct view of the crater of Strombolo, which seems to be essentially different from Vesuvius, and all the old volcanos that surround Naples. The craters of these are without exception in the center, and form the highest part of the mountain. That of Strombolo is on its side, and not within 200 yards of its summit. From the crater to the sea, the island is entirely composed of the same sort of ashes and burnt matter as the conical part of Vesuvius; and the quantity of this matter is perpetually increasing, from the uninterrupted discharge from the mountain; for of all the volcanos we read of, Strombolo seems to be the only one that burns without ceasing. *Ætna* and *Vesuvius* often lie quiet for many months, even years,

years, without the least appearance of fire, but Strombolo is ever at work, and for ages past has been looked upon as the great light-house of these seas. It is truly wonderful, how such a constant and immense fire is maintained for thousands of years, in the midst of the ocean ! That of the other Lipari islands seems now almost extinct, and the force of the whole appears to be concentrated in Strombolo ; which acts as one great vent to them all. We still observe Volcano and Volcanello throwing out volumes of smok, but during the whole night we could not perceive the least particle of fire from either of them. It is probable, that Strombolo, as well as all the rest of these islands, are originally the work of subterraneous fire. The matter of which they are composed, in a manner demonstrates this ; and many of the Sicilian authors confirm it. There are now eleven of them in all ; and none of the antients make mention of more than seven. Fazzello, one of the best Sicilian authors, gives us an account of the production of Volcano, now one of the most considerable of these islands. He says it happened in the early time of the republick, and is recorded by Eusebius, Pliny, and others. He adds, that even in his time (in the beginning of the 16th century) it still discharged quantities of fire and of pumice stones ; but that in the preceding century, in the year 1444, on the 5th of February, there happened a very great eruption of this island, which shook all Sicily and alarmed the coast of Italy as far as Naples. He says the sea boiled all around the island, and rocks of a vast size were discharged from the crater ; that fire and smok in many places pierced through the waves, and that the navigation amongst these islands was totally changed, rocks appearing where it was formerly deep water ; and many of the straits and shallows were entirely filled up. He says, that Aristotle, in his book on meteors, gives an account of a very early eruption of this island, by which not only the coast of Sicily, but likewise many cities in Italy, were covered with ashes. It  
has



has probably been this eruption that formed the island. He describes Strombolo to have been, in his time, pretty much the same as it is at this day; only that it then produced a great quantity of cotton, which is not now the case. The greatest part of it appears to be barren. On the north side there are a few vineyards, but they are very meagre: Opposite to these, there is a rock at some distance from land; it seems entirely of lava, and is not less than 50 or 60 feet above the water.

The whole island of Strombolo is a mountain that rises suddenly and rapidly from the sea; it is about ten miles round, and is not of the exact conical form, reckoned common to all volcanos. We were determined to have landed on the island, and to have attempted to examine the volcano; but our Sicilian pilot assures us, that the crater is not only altogether inaccessible (which indeed I own it appears to be) but that we shall likewise be obliged to perform a quarantine of 48 hours at Messina; and that, besides, we should run a great risk of being attacked by the natives of the island, who are little better than savages, and are ever on the alarm against the Turks.—On weighing these reasons, and putting the question, it was carried, To proceed on our voyage. I own it is with much regret that I leave this curious island, without being better acquainted with it. I have been looking with a good glass all round, but can see no marks of the eruption we heard so much of at Naples; indeed, the south-west part, where we saw the appearance of fire, is still hid from us by the interposition of the island; and if there has been an eruption, it was certainly on that side: It is probable we shall never be able to learn whether there has or not; or, at least, to make ourselves masters of any of the particulars of it; for events of that kind do not make such a noise in this ignorant and indolent country, as the blowing of an aloe, or a gooseberry

berry bush at Christmas, does in England. Strombolo rises to a very great height; our pilot says, much higher than Vesuvius; but I think he is mistaken. Both the captain and he agree, that in very clear weather it is discoverable at the distance of 25 leagues, and that at night its flames are to be seen still much farther; so that its visible horizon cannot be less than 500 miles, which will require a very considerable elevation.

The revenue these islands bring in to the king of Naples, is by no means inconsiderable. They produce great quantities of alum, sulphur, nitre, cinabar, and most sorts of fruits, particularly raisins, currants, and figs in great perfection; some of their wines are likewise much esteemed; particularly the Malvasia, well known all over Europe.

The island of Lipari (from which all the rest take the name) is by much the largest, as well as the most fertile. By the description Aristotle gives of this island, it appears that it was in his time, what Strombolo is in ours, considered by sailors as a lighthouse, as its fires were never extinguished. It has not suffered from subterraneous fires for many ages past, though it bears all over it the marks of its former state. This is the island supposed by Virgil (who is one of our travelling companions) to be the habitation of Æolus; but indeed all these islands were formerly called Æolian.—As they were full of vast caverns, roaring with internal fires, the poets feigned that Æolus kept the winds prisoners here, and let them out at his pleasure.—This allegorical fiction is of great use both to Virgil and Homer, when they want to make a storm; and forms no inconsiderable part of their machinery. A goddess has nothing to do but take a flight to the Lipari islands, and Æolus, who was the very pink of politeness, has always a storm ready at her command.

Homer



Homer indeed, departing sadly from his usual dignity, supposes that Æolus kept the winds here, tied up each in their respective bags; and when any particular wind was demanded, he made them a present of a bag full of it, to use at discretion. Some of the ancient historians (Diodorus I think) says, that this fable took its rise from a wise king named Æolus; who, from observing the smoak of these burning islands and other phænomena attending them, had learned to foretell the weather; and from thence was said to have the command of the winds.

The forge of Vulcan too has been supposed by the poets to be placed in Hiera, one of these islands. Virgil sends him here, to make the celestial armour for Æneas, and gives a noble description of this gloomy habitation\*, where he found the Cyclops busy forging a thunderbolt for Jupiter; the account of which is very singular†. This island is now called Volcano, the same that is recorded to have been produced by fire in the time of the Republic. So that Virgil commits here a very great chronogical error, in sending Vulcan to a place which at that time did not exist, nor for many ages after it.—But this bold poetical licence he amply repays us for, by the description he gives of it. These islands, he says, were called Volcanian as well as Æolian:

“ Volcani domus, et Volcania nomine tellus.”

\* Amid the Hesperian and Sicilian flood  
 All black with smoke, a rocky island flood,  
 The dark Vulcanian land, the region of the god,  
 Here the grim Cyclops ply, in vaults profound,  
 The huge Æolian forge, that thunders round.  
 Th’ eternal anvils ring the dungeon o’er;  
 From side to side the fiery caverns roar.

† Beneath their hands, tremendous to survey!  
 Half rough, half form’d, the dreadful engine lay;  
 Three points of rain; three forks of hail conspire;  
 Three arm’d with wind, and three were barb’d with fire.  
 The mass they temper’d thick with livid rays,  
 Fear, wrath, and terror, and the lightning’s blaze.

So that the change of the name from Hieria to Volcano was a very natural one.—This is the island that Pliny calls Terasia; and both Strabo and he give an account of its production.

19th. Found ourselves within half a mile of the coast of Sicily, which is low, but finely variegated. The opposite coast of Calabria is exceedingly high, and the mountains are covered with the finest verdure.—It was almost a dead calm, our ship scarce moving half a mile in an hour, so that we had time to get a perfect view of the famous rock of Scylla, on the Calabrian side, cape Pylorus on the Sicilian, and the celebrated straits of the Pharo that runs betwixt them. Whilst we were still some miles distant from the entry of the straits, we heard the roaring of the current, like the noise of some large impetuous river confined betwixt narrow banks. This increased in proportion as we advanced, till we saw the water in many places raised to a considerable height, and forming large eddies or whirlpools. The sea in every other place was as smooth as glass. Our old pilot told us, that he had often seen ships caught in these eddies, and whirled about with the greatest rapidity, without obeying the helm in the smallest degree. When the weather is calm, there is little danger; but when the waves meet with this violent current it makes a dreadful sea. He says, there were five ships wrecked in this spot last winter. We observed that the current set exactly for the rock of Scylla, and would infallibly have carried any thing thrown into it against that point; so that it was not without reason the ancients have painted it as an object of such terror. It is about a mile from the entry of the Faro, and forms a small promontory, which runs a little out to sea, and meets the whole force of the waters, as they come out of the narrowest part of the straits. The head of this promontory is the famous Scylla. It must be owned, that it does not  
altogether



altogether come up to the formidable description that Homer gives of it; the reading of which (like that of Shakespear's *Cliff*) almost makes one's head giddy. Neither is the passage so wondrous narrow and difficult as he makes it. Indeed it is probable that the breadth of it is greatly increased since his time, from the violent impetuosity of the current. And this violence too must have always diminished, in proportion as the breadth of the channel increased. Our pilot says, there are many small rocks that rear their heads near the base of the large one. These are probably the dogs that are described as howling round the monster *Scylla*. There are likewise many caverns that add greatly to the noise of the water, and tend still to increase the horror of the scene. The rock is near 200 feet high. There is a kind of castle or fort built on its summit; and the town of *Scylla*, containing three or four hundred inhabitants, stands on its south side, and gives the title of prince to a Calabrese family.

As the current was exactly against us, we were obliged to lie to, for some hours, till it turned. The motion of the water ceased for some time, but in a few minutes it began in the opposite direction, but not with such violence. We lay exactly opposite to *Cape Pelorus* (where the light-house is now built.) It is said to have been thus named by *Hannibal*, in recompence to *Pelorus* his pilot, for having put him to death on this spot, on a false suspicion of his wanting to betray him: For seeing himself land-locked on all sides, he thought there was no escaping, and that *Pelorus* had been bribed to deliver him up; but so soon as he discovered the Straits, he repented of his rashness, and some few years afterwards erected a statue here, in atonement to the manes of *Pelorus*. *Pomponius Mela* tells this story; from whence he draws two very wise inferences: That *Hannibal* must have been extremely passionate; and that he

knew nothing at all of geography. Others deny this authority, and say it was named Pelorus from Ulysses's pilot, who was drowned near to this spot; but there can be no sort of foundation for this conjecture; for Ulysses's whole crew were drowned at the same time, and he himself was driven through these Straits, mounted on the broken mast of his ship. It is like most disputes amongst antiquaries, a matter of mighty little consequence; and I leave you at full liberty to choose which of the two you please.

From this spot we had a very good opportunity of observing a pretty large portion of Calabria, which formerly constituted a considerable part of that celebrated country known by the name of Great Greece, and looked upon as one of the most fertile in the empire. These beautiful hills and mountains are covered over with trees and brush-wood to the very summit; and appear pretty much in the same state as some of the wilds of America, that are just beginning to be cultivated. Some little spots, where the woods are cleared away, just serve to shew the natural fertility of the soil; and what this country might soon be brought to, were industry and population encouraged; but it still remains a good deal in the same situation as when the barbarous nations left it; and I believe it is hard to say, whether their tyranny or that of Spain has been the most oppressive. After the eruption of these nations, and during the time of the dark and barbarous ages, this country (like many others) from the highest state of culture and civilization, became a wild and barren wilderness, overgrown with thickets and forests; and, indeed, since the revival of arts and agriculture, perhaps of all Europe this is the spot that has profited the least;—retaining still, both in the wildness of its fields and ferocity of its inhabitants, more of the Gothic barbarity than is to be met with any where else. Some of these forests are of a vast extent, and absolutely impenetrable;



netrable; and no doubt conceal in their thickets many valuable monuments of its ancient magnificence. Of this indeed we have a very recent proof in the discovery of Pestum, a Grecian city, that had not been heard of for a vast number of ages; till of late some of its magnificent temples were seen, peeping over the tops of the woods, upbraiding mankind for their shameful neglect, and calling upon them to bring it once more to light. Accordingly curiosity, and the hopes of gain, a much more powerful motive, soon opened a passage, and exposed to view these valuable and respectable relicks.—But here it would be out of place to give you an account of them; I shall reserve that till my return.

So soon as our ship entered the current, we were carried along with incredible velocity towards Messina, which is twelve miles distant from the entry of the Straits. However, as the passage widens in proportion as you advance, the current of consequence becomes less rapid. At Messina it is four miles broad. At the mouth of the Straits, betwixt the promontories of Pelorus in Sicily, and the Coda di Volpe (or Fox's Tail) in Calabria, it appears scarcely to be a mile. Most of the ancient writers are clearly of opinion, that Sicily was formerly joined to the continent in this spot, and that the separation must have been made by some very violent convulsion of the earth. If this is true, which indeed does not appear improbable, it must have happened vastly beyond the reach of all history, as none of them, at least that I have seen, pretend any thing but conjecture for the foundation of their opinion. Indeed Claudian (were credit to be given to poets) says positively,

“Trinacria quondam Italiæ pars una fuit.”

And Virgil too, in his third Eneid, tells the same story:

“Hæc loca vi quondam, et vasta convulsa ruina,  
&c. &c.”

Pliny, Strabo, Diodorus, and many others, both historians and philosophers, are of the same sentiments, and pretend that the strata in the opposite sides of the Straits agree perfectly: Like the white rocks near Dover and Boulogne, which have given rise to an opinion of the same kind. However, the similarity in that case is much more striking to the eye, at least, than in this.

The approach to Messina is the finest that can be imagined; it is not so grand as that of Naples, but it is much more beautiful, and the key greatly exceeds any thing I have ever yet seen, even in Holland. It is built in the form of a crescent, and is surrounded by a range of magnificent buildings, four stories high, and exactly uniform, for the space of an Italian mile. The breadth of the street betwixt these and the sea is about an hundred feet, and forms one of the most delightful walks in the world. It enjoys the freest air, and commands the most beautiful prospect: It is only exposed to the morning sun, being shaded all the rest of the day by these sumptuous buildings. It is besides perpetually refreshed by the cooling breeze from the Straits; for the current of the water produces likewise a current in the air, that renders this one of the coolest habitations in Sicily.

We cast anchor, about four this afternoon, near the centre of this enchanted semicircle, the beauty of which greatly delighted us; but our pleasure was soon interrupted, by a discovery that the name of one of our servants had been omitted in our bills of health; and an assurance from the captain, that if he was discovered we should certainly be obliged to perform a long quarantine. Whilst we were deliberating upon this weighty matter, we observed a boat with the people of the health office approaching us. We had just time to get him wrapped up in a hammock, and shut down below the hatches, with orders not to stir in case of a search, and not to appear again  
above



above deck till he should be called.—The poor fellow was obliged to keep in his hole till it was dark, as our consul and some people of the health-office stayed on board much longer than we could have wished, and we are still obliged to conceal him; for if he is discovered, we shall probably get into a very bad scrape. They are particularly strict here in this respect; and indeed they have great reason to be so; since this beautiful city was almost annihilated by the plague in the year 1743, when upwards of 70,000 people are said to have died in the city and district in the space of a few months.

We have now got on shore, and are lodged in the most wretched of inns; although said to be a first rate one for Sicily; but we are contented; for surely after bad ship accommodation and sea sickness, any house will appear a palace, and any bit of dry land a paradise.

I shall send this off by the post, which goes tomorrow for Naples; and shall continue from day to day to give you some account of our transactions; trifling as they are, there will probably be something new; and it will add greatly to the pleasure of our expedition, to think that it has contributed to your entertainment.

Adieu.

### LETTER III.

Messina, May 20th.

**T**HE harbour of Messina is formed by a small promontary or neck of land that runs off from the east end of the city, and separates that beautiful basin from the rest of the Straits. The shape of this promontary is exactly that of a reaping hook, the curvature of which forms the harbour, and secures it from all winds. From the striking resemblance of its form,

form, the Greeks, who never gave a name that did not either describe the object or express some of its most remarkable properties, called this place Zancle or the Sickle, and feigned that the sickle of Saturn fell on this spot, and gave it its form. But the Latins, who were not quite so fond of fable, changed its name to Messina (from *messis*, a harvest) because of the great fertility of its fields. It is certainly one of the most commodious and safest harbours in the world after ships have got in; but it is likewise one of the most difficult of access. The celebrated gulph or whirlpool of Charybdis lies near to its entry, and often occasions such an intestine and irregular motion in the water, that the helm loses most of its power, and ships have great difficulty to get in, even with the fairest wind that can blow.—This whirlpool, I think, is probably formed by the small promontory I have mentioned, which contracting the Straits in this spot, must necessarily increase the velocity of the current; but no doubt there are other causes of which we are ignorant, for this will by no means account for all the phænomena which it has produced. The great noise occasioned by the tumultuous motion of the waters in this place, made the antients liken it to a voracious sea monster perpetually roaring for its prey; and it has been represented by all their authors, as the most tremendous passage in the world. Aristotle gives a long and a formidable description of it in his 125th chapter De Admirandis, which I find translated in an old Sicilian book I have got here. It begins, “Adeo profundum, horridumque spectaculum, &c.” but it is too long to transcribe. It is likewise described by Homer \*, (12th of the Odyssey;)

\* Dire Scylla there a scene of horror forms,  
 And here Charybdis fills the deep with storms:  
 When the tide rushes from her rumbling caves,  
 The rough rock roars; tumultuous boil the waves;  
 They



sey;) Virgil, 3d *Æneid*;) Lucretius, Ovid, Sallust, Seneca, as also by many of the old Italian and Sicilian poets, who all speak of it in terms of horror; and represent it as an object that inspired terror, even when looked on at a distance.—It certainly is not now so formidable; and very probably, the violence of this motion, continued for so many ages, has by degrees wore smooth the rugged rocks, and jutting shelves, that may have intercepted and confined the waters. The breadth of the Straits too, in this place, I make no doubt is considerably enlarged. Indeed, from the nature of things it must be so; the perpetual friction occasioned by the current must necessarily wear away the bank on each side, and enlarge the bed of the water.

The vessels in this passage were obliged to go as near as possible to the coast of Calabria, in order to avoid the violent suction occasioned by the whirling of the waters in this vortex; by which means when they came to the narrowest and most rapid part of the Straits, betwixt Cape Pelorus and Scylla, they were in great danger of being carried directly against that rock. From whence the proverb, still applied to those, who in attempting to avoid one evil fall into another,

“*Incidit in Scyllam, cupiens evitare Charibdem.*”

There is a fine fountain of white marble on the port, representing Neptune holding Scylla and Charybdis chained, under the emblematical figures of two sea monsters, such as represented by the poets.

The little neck of land, that forms the harbour of Messina, is strongly fortified. The citadel, which is

They tofs, they foam, a wild confusion raise,  
Like waters bubbling o'er the fiery blaze;  
Eternal mists obscure th' aerial plain,  
And high above the rock she spouts the main.  
When in her gulphs the rushing sea subsides,  
She drains the ocean with the reflux tides.  
The rock re-bellows with a thundering sound;  
Deep, wondrous deep, below appears the ground.

POPE.  
indeed

indeed a very fine fortification, is built on that part which connects it with the main land. The farthest point, which runs out to sea, is defended by four little forts, which command the entry into the harbour. Betwixt these lie the lazaret and another light-house, to warn sailors of their approach to Charybdis, as that on Cape Pelorus is intended to give them notice of Scylla.

It is probably from these light-houses (by the Greeks called Pharos) that the whole of this celebrated Strait has been denominated the Faro of Messina.

There are a number of gallies and galliots in this beautiful harbour, which still add greatly to its beauty. Three of these sailed this morning, in order to cruize round the island, and to protect it from the sudden invasions of the Barbarians, who are often very troublesome on the south coast.—They made a very picturesque appearance as they went out of the harbour; their oars moving all together, with the greatest exactness and regularity. I think there are nine or ten men to each oar; and indeed it appears to be the hardest work you can imagine. They all rise, every stroke of the oar, and when they pull, they almost throw themselves on their backs, and seem to exert their utmost force. These poor wretches are chained to their oars, and sleep every night on their bare hard benches, without any thing to throw over them. Yet, what is singular, notwithstanding all the misery they suffer, I am told there was never known an instance of any of them putting themselves to death. They often, indeed, confer that favour upon one another, but it is only in their quarrels, and by no means out of kindness.—In a company of English in the same circumstances, promotion would probably go on much faster, as there would be no want of vacancies, provided only ropes and knives were to be had.

We



We intended this morning to have paid our respects to the prince of Villa Franca, the governor, and to have delivered our letters; but he is gone to his country house; and as there are no carriages to be had, we are obliged to wait his arrival in town, which will probably be to-morrow or next day.

We are still under a good deal of uneasiness about our servant, and are obliged to conceal him carefully from the people of the health-office, who seem to haunt us, as we have met them this morning in all our walks. Were he to be discovered, perhaps some of us might have the pleasure of making a little voyage, on board one of these galleys, for our amusement.—Indeed the captain of the ship, poor fellow, would run the greatest risk, who is obliged to answer for every person on board.—We shall leave this as soon as possible; for I do not believe there is much more to be seen about it.

20th at night. After dinner our depute-consul (a Sicilian) carried us to several convents, where we were received with great politeness and affability by the nuns. We conversed with them for some hours through the grate, and found some of them by no means deficient, either in point of knowledge or sprightliness. None of them had sincerity enough (which we met with in Portugal more than once) to acknowledge the unhappiness of their situation. All pretended to be happy and contented, and declared they would not change their prison for the most brilliant situation in life: However, some of them had a soft melancholy in their countenances, that gave the lie to their words; and I am persuaded, in a tête-a-tête, and on a more intimate acquaintance, they would have told a very different story. Several of them are extremely handsome;—but, indeed, I think they always appear so; and am very certain, from frequent experience, that there is no artificial ornament or studied embellishment whatever, that can produce

produce half so strong an effect, as the modest and simple attire of a pretty young nun, placed behind a double iron grate. To see an amiable, unaffected, and unadorned person, that might have been an honour and an ornament to society, make a voluntary resignation of her charms, and give up the world, and all its pleasures, for a life of fasting and mortification, it cannot fail to move our pity ;

“ And pity melts the mind to love.”

There is another consideration that tends greatly to increase these feelings ; that is, our total incapacity ever to alter her situation.—The pleasure of relieving an object in distress, is the only refuge we have against the pain which the seeing of that object occasions ; but here, that is utterly denied us, and we feel with sorrow, that pity is all we can bestow.

From these, and similar considerations, a man generally feels himself in bad spirits after conversing with amiable nuns. Indeed it is hardly possible, without a fit of the vapours, to leave the grate ; that inexorable and impenetrable barrier.—At last we took our leave, expressing our happiness, in being admitted so near them ; and at the same time deploring our misery, in seeing them for ever removed at so unmeasurable a distance from us. They were much pleased with our visit, and begged we would repeat it every day during our stay at Messina ; but this might prove dangerous.

On leaving the convent, we observed a vast concourse of people on the top of a high hill, at some distance from the city. The consul told us it was the celebration of a great festival in honour of St. Francis, and was worth our going to see. Accordingly, we arrived just as the saint made his appearance. He was carried through the crowd with vast ceremony, and received the homage of the people with a becoming dignity ; after which he was again lodged in his chapel,



chapel, where he performs a number of miracles every day, to all those who have abundance of money and abundance of faith. His ministers, however, are only a set of poor greasy capuchins; who indeed do not seem to have enriched themselves in his service. In general, he is but a shabby master, if one may judge by the tattered cloaths of his servants; and St. Benedict, who does not pretend to half his sanctity, beats him all to nothing. The people continued to dance, in soft Sicilian measures, till after sunset, when they retired. The country girls are, many of them, extremely handsome, and dance with a good grace. The young fellows were all in their Sunday's cloaths, and made a very good appearance. The assembly room, was a fine green plain on the top of the hill. It pleased us very much, and put us in mind of some of Theocritus's descriptions of the Sicilian pleasures. But Theocritus, if he could have raised up his head, would probably have been a good deal puzzled what to make of the shabby figure of St. Francis, marching through amongst them with such majesty and solemnity. Another part of the ceremony too would have greatly alarmed him, as indeed it did us. The whole court before the church was surrounded with a triple row of small iron cannon, about six inches long; these were charged to the muzzle, and rammed very hard; after which they were set close to one another, and a train laid, that completed the communication through the whole number, which must have exceeded 2000. Fire was set to the train, and in two or three minutes the whole was discharged, by a running fire; the reports following one another so quick, that it was impossible for the ear to separate them. The effect was very grand; but it would have been nothing without the fine echo from the high mountains on each side of the Straits, which prolonged the sound for a great while after the firing was finished.

The

The view from the top of this hill, is beautiful beyond description. The Straits appear like an immense majestic river, flowing slowly betwixt two vast ridges of mountains, and opening by degrees from its narrowest point, till it swells to the size of an ocean. Its banks, at the same time, covered over with rich corn-fields, vineyards, orchards, towns, villages, and churches. The prospect is terminated on each side by the tops of high mountains covered with beautiful woods.

We observed, in our walks to-day, many of the flowers that are much esteemed in our gardens, and others too that we are not acquainted with. Larkspur, Flos Adonis, Venus' looking-glass, hawksweed, and very fine lupins, grow wild over all these mountains. They have likewise a variety of flowering shrubs; particularly one in great plenty, which I do not recollect ever to have seen before: It bears a beautiful round fruit, of a bright shining yellow. They call it, *il pomo d'oro*, or golden apple. All the fields about Messina are covered with the richest white clover, intermixed with a variety of aromatic plants, which perfume the air with the most grateful odour, and render their walks exceedingly delightful. But what is remarkable, we were most sensible of this perfume, when walking on the harbour which is at the greatest distance from these fields. I mentioned this peculiarity to a Messinese gentleman, who tells me, that the salt produced here by the heat of the sun, emits a delightful smell, something like violets; and it is that, probably, which perfumes the sea-shore. On consulting Fazello *De rebus Siculis*, I find he takes notice of the same singularity; and likewise observes, that the water of the Straits has a viscous or glutinous quality, that by degrees cements the sand and gravel together, and at last consolidates it to the hardness of rock.

There are fine shady walks on all sides of Messina; some of these run along the sea-shore, and are for  
ever



ever fanned by the cooling breeze from the Straits.—The houses are large and commodious, and most of the articles of life are cheap and in plenty; particularly fish, which are reckoned better here, perhaps, than any where else in the Mediterranean. The hire of lodgings is next to nothing; almost one half of that noble range of buildings I have described, being absolutely uninhabited since the terrible desolation of 1743; so that the proprietors are glad to get tenants on any conditions whatever.—It now occurs to me, that from all these considerations, there is no place I have ever yet seen, so admirably calculated for the residence of that flock of valetudinarians, which every autumn leave our country with the swallows, in search of warm climates. I have been enquiring with regard to their winter season, and find they all agree, that the winter climate here, in general, is much preferable to that of Naples. They allow, that they are sometimes deluged with rain, for two or three weeks; but it never lasts longer; and that besides, they have always some fair hours every day, when they can take their exercise; for the moment the rain is over, the walks are dry, the soil being a light gravel.

The advantages of Messina over Naples in other respects, I think, are very great.—At Naples there are no walks; and, the truth is, they have no occasion for them, no more, indeed, than they have for legs; for, you know as well as I, that walking there, is much more infamous than stealing; and any person that makes use of his legs is looked upon as a black-guard, and despised by all good company. The rides too are all at a great distance; and you are obliged to go some miles on streets and pavement before you get into the country; besides passing the vile grotto of Paullippe, where you are in danger of being blinded, and stifled with dust. There are seldom any public diversions here; the attending of which at Naples, and

complying with their bad hours, does often more than counteract all the benefit obtained from the climate. That execrable practice of gaming too, is by no means so prevalent here; which from the anxiety it occasions to the mind, and lassitude to the body, must be death to all hectic people, weak breasts or delicate nerves. I could say much more on this subject, but as I have many of these circumstances only from the report of the inhabitants, it makes me more diffident, than if I had known them from my own experience. We found our banker, Mr. Maestre, a very sensible intelligent man, and spent some hours with him, both this morning and evening, in very agreeable conversation. He has given us some account of the police of this country, the most singular, perhaps, of any in the world, to such a degree, indeed, that I shall not venture to tell it you, till I have talked it over with some other people, to see if the accounts agree;—though by the character he bears, both here and at Naples, he is as good authority as any in the island.

The prince of Villa Franca is arrived; so that we shall probably have our audience to-morrow morning. Adieu—we are just going to sup upon steaks made of the *pesce spada* or sword fish, which are caught in great plenty in these seas. The sword of this one, is upwards of four feet long; and a formidable weapon it is; not unlike a Highland broadsword. This fish, when cut, bears a perfect resemblance to flesh; so much indeed, that none of us doubted, that it was beef-stakes they were dressing for us, and expressed our surprize at finding that dish in Sicily.—Good night.

Ever yours,

P. B.

L E T-



## LETTER IV.

21st. **W**E are just returned from the prince's. He received us politely, but with a good deal of state. He offered us the use of his carriages, as there are none to be hired ; and, in the usual stile, begged to know in what he could be of service to us. We told him, (with an apology for our abrupt departure) that we were obliged to set off to-morrow, and begged his protection on our journey : He replied, that he would immediately give orders for guards to attend us, that should be answerable for every thing ; that we need give ourselves no farther trouble ; that whatever number of mules we had occasion for, should be ready at the door of the inn, at any hour we should think proper to appoint : He added, that we might entirely rely on these guards, who were people of the most determined resolution, as well as of the most approved confidence, and would not fail to chastise on the spot any person that should presume to impose upon us.

Now, who do you think these trusty and well beloved guards are composed of ? Why of the most daring, and most hardened villains, perhaps, that are to be met with upon earth, who, in any other country, would have been broken upon the wheel, or hung in chains ; but are here publicly protected, and universally feared and respected. It was this part of the police of Sicily, that I was afraid to give you an account of : However, I have now conversed with the prince's people on the subject, and they have confirmed every circumstance that Mr. Meastre made me acquainted with.

He told me, that in this east part of the island, called Val Demoni, from the devils that are supposed

to inhabit Mount Ætna ; it has ever been found altogether impracticable to extirpate the banditti ; there being numberless caverns and subterraneous passages around that mountain, where no troops could possibly pursue them : That, besides, as they are known to be perfectly determined and resolute, never failing to take a dreadful revenge on all who have offended them, the prince of Villa Franca has embraced it, not only as the safest, but likewise as the wisest, and most political scheme, to become their declared patron and protector. And such of them as think proper to leave their mountains and forests, though perhaps only for a time, are sure to meet with good encouragement, and a certain protection in his service, where they enjoy the most unbounded confidence, which, in no instance, they have ever yet been found to make an improper or a dishonest use of. They are clothed in the prince's livery, yellow and green, with silver lace ; and wear likewise a badge of their honourable order, which entitles them to universal fear and respect from the people.

I have just been interrupted by an upper servant of the prince's, who, both by his looks and language, seems to be of the same worthy fraternity. He tells us, that he has ordered our muleteers, at their peril, to be ready by day-break ; but that we need not go till we think proper ; for it is their business to attend on *nostri eccellenzi*.——He says he has likewise ordered two of the most desperate fellows in the whole island to accompany us ; adding, in a sort of whisper, that we need be under no apprehension ; for that if any person should presume to impose upon us of a single baiocc\*, that they would certainly put them to death. I gave him an ounce†, which I knew was what he expected ; on which he redoubled his bows and his eccellanças, and declared we were the most *honorabili*

• A small coin.

† About eleven shillings.



*Signiori* he had ever met with, and that if we pleased, he himself should have the honour of attending us, and would chastise any person that should dare to take the wall of us, or injure us in the most minute trifle. — We thanked him for his zeal, shewing him we had swords of our own. On which, bowing respectfully, he retired.

I can now, with more assurance, give you some account of the conversation I had with Signior Maestre who seems to be a very intelligent man, and has resided here for these great many years.

He says, that in some circumstances these banditti are the most respectable people of the island ; and have by much the highest, and most romantic notions of what they call their point of honour. That, however criminal they may be with regard to society in general, yet, with respect to one another, and to every person to whom they have once professed it, they have ever maintained the most unshaken fidelity. The magistrates have often been obliged to protect them, and pay them court, as they are known to be perfectly determined and desperate, and so extremely vindictive, that they will certainly put any person to death, that has ever given them just cause of provocation. On the other hand, it never was known that any person who had put himself under their protection, and shewed that he had confidence in them, had cause to repent of it, or was injured by any of them, in the most minute trifle ; but on the contrary, they will protect him from impositions of every kind, and scorn to go halves with the landlord, like most other conductors and travelling servants ; and will defend him with their lives, if there is occasion. That those of their number, who have thus enlisted themselves in the service of society, are known and respected by the other banditti all over the island ; and the persons of those they accompany are ever held sacred. For these reasons, most travellers chuse to hire a couple

ple of them from town to town ; and may thus travel over the whole island in safety. To illustrate their character the more, he added two stories, which happened but a few days ago, and are still in every body's mouth :

A number of people were found digging in a place where some treasure was supposed to have been hid during the plague : As this has been forbid under the most severe penalties, they were immediately carried to prison, and expected to have been treated without mercy ; but, luckily for the others, one of these heroes happened to be of the number. He immediately wrote to the prince of Villa Franca, and made use of such powerful arguments in their favours, that they were all immediately set at liberty.

This will serve to shew their consequence with the civil power ; the other story will give you a strong idea of their barbarous ferocity, and the horrid mixture of stubborn vice and virtue (if I may call it by that name) that seems to direct their actions. I should have mentioned, that they have a practice of borrowing money from the country people, who never dare refuse them ; and if they promise to pay it, they have ever been found punctual and exact, both as to the time and the sum ; and would much rather rob and murder an innocent person, than fail of payment at the day appointed : And this they have often been obliged to do, only in order (as they say) to fulfil their engagements, and to save their honour.

It happened within this fortnight, that the brother of one of these heroic banditti having occasion for money, and not knowing how to procure it, determined to make use of his brother's name and authority, an artifice which he thought could not easily be discovered ; accordingly he went to a country priest, and told him his brother had occasion for twenty ducats, which he desired he would immediately lend him. The priest assured him that he had not so large a sum,  
but



but that if he would return in a few days it should be ready for him. The other replied, that he was afraid to return to his brother with this answer; and desired, that he would by all means take care to keep out of his way, at least till such time as he had pacified him; otherwise he could not be answerable for the consequences.—As bad fortune would have it, the very next day the priest and the robber met in a narrow road; the former fell a trembling, as the latter approached, and at last dropped on his knees to beg for mercy. The robber, astonished at this behaviour, desired to know the cause of it. The trembling priest answered, “ Il denaro, il denaro.” The money, the money—but send your brother to-morrow, and you shall have it. The haughty robber assured him, that he disdained taking money of a poor priest; adding, that if any of his brothers had been low enough to make such a demand, he himself was ready to advance the sum. The priest acquainted him with the visit he had received the preceding night from his brother, by his order; assuring him, that if he had been master of the sum, he should immediately have supplied it.—Well, says the robber, I will now convince you whether my brother or I are most to be believed; you shall go with me to his house, which is but a few miles distant.—On their arrival before the door, the robber called on his brother; who never suspecting the discovery, immediately came to the balcony; but on perceiving the priest, he began to make excuses for his conduct. The robber told him, there was no excuse to be made; that he only desired to know the fact: If he had gone to borrow money of that priest in his name or not?—On his owning it, the robber with deliberate coolness lifted his blunderbuss to his shoulder, and shot him dead; and turning to the astonished priest, “ You will now be persuaded, said he, that I had no intention of robbing you at least.”

You may now judge how happy we must be in the company of our guards. I don't know but this very hero may be one of them ; as we are assured they are two of the most intrepid and resolute fellows in the island. I will not close this letter, till I give you some account of our journey. In the mean time, adieu. We are going to take a look of the churches and public buildings ; but with these I shall trouble you very little.

21st at night. We have been very well entertained, both from what we have seen and heard. We used to admire the dexterity of some of the divers at Naples, when they went to the depth of forty-eight or fifty feet, and could not conceive how a man could remain three minutes below water without drawing breath ; but these are nothing to the feats of one Colas, a native of this place, who is said to have lived for several days in the sea, without coming to land ; and from thence got the surname of *Pesce*, or the fish. Some of the Sicilian authors affirm, that he caught fish merely by his agility in the water ; and the credulous Kircher asserts, that he could walk across the Straits at the bottom of the sea.—Be that as it will, he was so much celebrated for swimming and diving, that one of their kings (Frederick) came on purpose to see him perform ; which royal visit proved fatal to poor *Pesce* ; for the king, after admiring his wonderful force and agility, had the cruelty to propose his diving near the gulph of *Charybdis* ; and to tempt him the more, threw in a large golden cup, which was to be his prize should he bring it up. *Pesce* made two attempts, and astonished the spectators by the time he remained under water ; but in the third, it is thought he was caught by the whirlpool, for he never appeared more ; and his body is said to have been found some time afterwards near *Jaurominum* (about thirty miles distant) it having ever been observed, that what is swallowed up by *Charybdis* is carried south



south by the current, and thrown out upon that coast. On the contrary, nothing wrecked here was ever carried through the Straits, or thrown out on the north of Sicily, unless we believe what Homer says of the ship of Ulysses.—We have been again to take a view of the Straits at this famous whirlpool, and are more and more convinced, that it must be infinitely diminished; indeed, (in comparison of what it was) almost reduced to nothing. The sea appeared to have no extraordinary motion there, and ships and boats seemed to pass it with ease.—When we compare this its present state, with the formidable description of all antient authors, poets, historians, and philosophers, I think it really appears somewhat probable that this island has been torn from the continent by some violent shock; and that near to this spot, huge caverns must have been opened, which, drinking in the waters in one course of the current, and throwing them out in the other, may perhaps in some measure account for the phænomena of Charybdis.—I find it is described both by Homer and Virgil, as alternately swallowing up, and throwing out every object that approached it \*. Now, is it not probable, that these caverns may have been, in a great measure, filled up in process of time, by the immense quantities of rocks, sand, gravel, &c. that was perpetually carried in by the force of the current?—I own I am not quite satisfied with this solution, but at present I cannot think of a better:—The fact, however, is certain, that it must have been a dreadful phænomenon even in Virgil's time, else he never would have made Æneas and his fleet perceive its effects at so great a distance, and immediately run

\* *Dextrum Scylla latus, lævum implacata Charybdis  
Obsidet, atque imo barathri ter gurgite vastos  
Sorbet in abruptum fluctus, rursusque sub auras  
Erigit alternos, et sidera verberat unda.*

out to sea to avoid it ; nor would he have made Helenus at such pains to caution him against that dangerous gulph, and advise him much rather to make the whole tour of Sicily than attempt to pass it. Indeed, it is so often mentioned both in the voyage of Æneas and Ulysses, and always in such frightful terms, that we cannot doubt of its having been a very terrible object. Seneca gives the following account of it in a letter to Lucillus \* :

\* “ Scyllam saxum esse, et quidem terribile navigantibus optime scio ; Charybdæ an respondeat fabulis perferri mihi desidero, fac nos certiores, utrum uno tantum vento agatur in vortices, an omnis tempestas, ac mare illud contorqueat, et an verum sit quicquid illo freti turbine arreptum est.”

And Strabo has the following passage, L. 6.

“ Ante urbem Paululum in trajectu Charybdæ ostenditur : Profundum quidem immensum : Quo inundationes freti : mirum in modum navigia detrahunt : magnas per circumductiones, et vortices precipitata, quibus absorptis, ac dissolutis ; naufragiorum fragmenta ad Tauromitanum lictus attrahuntur, &c.”

Sallust says,

“ Est igitur Charybdæ, mare periculosum nautis ; quod contrariis fluctuum cursibus, collisionem facit, et rapta quoque absorbet.”

But these are moderate indeed when compared to the descriptions of the poets :

That realm of old a ruin huge was rent,  
In length of ages, from the continent.  
With force convulsive burst the isle away ;  
Through the dread opening broke the thundering sea.  
At once the thundering sea Sicilia tore,  
And sunder'd from the fair Hesperian shore ;  
And still the neighbouring coasts and towns divides  
With scanty channels and contracted tides.  
Fierce to the right tremendous Scylla roars,  
Charybdæ on the left the flood devours :  
Thrice swallow'd in her womb subsides the sea,  
Deep, deep as hell ; and thrice she spouts away  
From her black bellowing gulphs disgorg'd on high  
Waves after waves, that dash against the sky.

PITT.

After



After seeing the beautiful harbour of Messina, we have found nothing much worthy of notice in the city. Some of the churches are very well, and there are a few tolerable paintings. One ceremony, from the account they give of it, I should like much to have seen: The celebration of the feast of the Vara. It appears, indeed, to be a very singular exhibition, and I am heartily sorry it does not happen at this season.—In order to the more dignified appearance of the Virgin Mary on this occasion, they have invented a very curious machine, which I am told represents heaven, or at least a small portion of it. It is of a huge size, and moves through the street with vast pomp and ceremony. In the centre is the principal figure, which represents the Virgin; and, a little higher, there are three others to denote the Trinity. Round these, there are a number of wheels, said to be of a very curious construction.—Every wheel contains a legion of angels, according to their different degrees of precedence; seraphims, cherubims, and powers. These are represented by a great number of beautiful little children, all glittering in clothes of gold and silver tissue; with large wings of painted feathers fixed to their shoulders.—When the machine is set in motion, all these wheels move round, and the different choirs of angels continue in a constant flutter singing Hallelujahs round the Trinity and the Virgin during the whole of the procession, and are said to make a most beautiful appearance. This is all I could learn of this singular shew, neither were we admitted to see the machine; conscious, I suppose, of the ridicule of which it is susceptible, they did not chuse to unveil so sacred an object to the eyes of heretics.—This island has ever been famous for the celebration of its feasts, even in antient as well as modern times. They spare no expence; and as they have a very large share both of superstition and invention,

tion, they never fail to produce something either exceedingly fine, or exceedingly ridiculous. The feast of St. Rosalia at Palermo is said to be the finest shew in Europe, and costs that city every year a vast sum of money. They assure us there are much more taste and magnificence displayed in it, than in any thing of the kind in Italy; and advise us by all means to attend it, as it happens some time near the middle of summer, when we shall probably be in that end of the island. If you please we shall now take leave of Messina;—I did not expect to make so much out of it.—But it would not be fair neither, without at least putting you in mind of the great veneration it has ever been held in by the rest of Sicily, for the assistance it gave to Count Rugiero in freeing the island from the yoke of the Saracens; in consideration of which, great privileges were granted it by the succeeding kings; some of which are said still to remain.—It was here that the Normans landed; and this city, by the policy of some of its own inhabitants, was the first conquest they made; after which their victorious arms were soon extended over the whole island; and a final period for ever put to the Saracen tyranny. Count Rugiero fixed the seat of empire at Palermo, and put the political system of the island upon a solid basis; the form of which (and the form alone) still remains to this day. He divided the whole island into three parts; one he gave to his officers, another to the church, and a third he reserved for himself. Of these three branches he composed his parliament, the skeleton of which still exists; but it has long ago lost all its blood, nerves, and animal spirits; and for many ages past has been reduced to a perfect caput mortuum: The superstitious tyranny of Spain, having not only blasted the national spirit of its own inhabitants, but likewise that of every other people, who have come within reach of its contagious



tagious and pestilential breath.—But I must beware of these subjects, otherwise my correspondence may swell to too great a size. Adieu.

Ever yours,

P. B.

P. S. Apropos—There is one thing I had almost forgot,—and I never should have forgiven myself. Do you know, the most extraordinary phænomenon in the world is often observed near to this place?—I laugh'd at it, at first, as you will do; but I am now thoroughly convinced of its reality; and am persuaded too, that if ever it had been thoroughly examined by a philosophical eye, the natural cause must long ago have been assigned.

It has often been remarked, both by the antients and moderns, that in the heat of summer, after the sea and air have been greatly agitated by winds, and a perfect calm succeeds, there appears, about the time of dawn, in that part of the heavens over the Straits, a vast variety of singular forms, some at rest, and some moving about with great velocity. These forms, in proportion as the light increases, seem to become more aerial; till at last, some time before sun-rise, they entirely disappear.

Some of the Sicilian authors represent this as the most beautiful sight in nature; Leanti, one of their latest and best writers, came here on purpose to see it: He says, the heavens appear crowded with a variety of beautiful objects: He mentions palaces, woods, gardens, &c. besides the figures of men, and other animals, that appear in motion amongst these objects.—No doubt the imagination must be greatly aiding, in forming this aerial creation; but as most of their authors, both antient and modern, agree in the fact, and many give an account of it from their own observation, there certainly must be some considerable

considerable foundation for the story. There is a Jesuit, one Giardina, that has lately writ a treatise on this phænomenon, but I have not been able to find it: The celebrated Messinese Gallo has likewise published something on this singular subject; if I can procure them in the island, you shall have a more perfect account of it. The common people, according to custom, give the whole merit of it to the devil; and indeed it is by much the shortest and easiest way of accounting for it: Those who pretend to be philosophers, and refuse him this honour, are greatly puzzled what to make of it. They think it may be owing to some uncommon refraction, or reflection of the rays, from the water of the Straits; which, as it is at this time carried about in a variety of eddies and vortexes, must of consequence, say they, make a variety of appearances on any medium where it is reflected.—This, I think, is nonsense, or at least very near it; and, till they can say more to the purpose, I think they had much better have left it in the hands of the old gentleman. I suspect it is something in the nature of our Aurora Borealis; and, like many of the great phænomena of nature, depends upon electrical causes; which, in future ages, I have little doubt, will be found to be as powerful an agent in regulating the universe, as gravity is in this age, or as the subtile fluid was in the last.

Electrical vapour, in this country of volcanos, is certainly produced in much greater quantity than in any other. The air, strongly impregnated with this matter, and confined betwixt two ridges of mountains, at the same time exceedingly agitated from below, by the violence of the current, and the impetuous whirling of the waters; may it not be supposed to produce a variety of appearances? And may not the lively Sicillian imaginations, animated by a belief in dæmons, and all the wild offspring of superstition,



perstition, give these appearances as great a variety of forms? Remember, I do not say it is so, and hope yet to have it in my power to give you a better account of it. However, if you should suppose me in this story, or in any future one I may tell you, to be inclined to the fabulous, you will please to remember, that I am now in the country of fable, this island having given rise to more perhaps, except Greece, than all the world beside. You have, therefore, only to suppose that these regions are still contagious; and call to mind that mount *Ætna* has ever been the great mother of monsters and chimeras both in the antient and the modern world. However, I shall, if possible, keep free of the infection, and entertain you only with such subjects as fall under my own observation. But indeed, from what I have already heard of that wonderful mountain, the most moderate account of it would appear highly fabulous to all such as are unacquainted with objects of this kind. Adieu. We think of setting off to-morrow by day-break. I am sorry it has not been a storm, that we might have had a chance of seeing Pandemonium reared over our heads, and all the devils at work around it.

I shall leave this to be sent by the first post, and shall write you again from Catania, if we escape unhurt from all the perils of *Ætna*.

Adieu!

P. B.

L E T.

## L E T T E R V.

Giardini, near Taurmino, May 22d.

WE have had a delightful journey, and if all Sicily is but as agreeable, we shall not repent of our expedition. We left Messina early this morning, with six mules for ourselves and servants, and two for our baggage. This train, I assure you, makes no contemptible appearance ; particularly when you call to mind our front and rear guard ; by much the most conspicuous part of it. These are two great draw-cansir figures, armed cap-a-pie, with a broad hanger, two enormous pistols, and a long arquebuse : This they kept cock'd and ready for action in all suspicious places ; where they recounted us abundance of wonderful stories of robberies and murders ; some of them, with such very minute circumstances, that I am fully persuaded they themselves were the principal actors. However, I look upon our situation as perfectly secure ; they pay us great respect, and take the utmost pains that we shall not be imposed upon. Indeed, I think they impose upon every body else, except us ; for they tax the bills according to their pleasure ; and such cheap ones I never paid before. To-day's dinner for eleven men (our three muleteers included) and feeding for ten mules and horses, did not amount to half a guinea. And, although we pay them high, (an ounce a day each) yet I am persuaded they save us at least one half of it on our bills. — They entertained us with some of their feats, and make no scruple of owning their having put several people to death ; but add ; “ Mas tutti, tutti honorabilmente,” — That is to say that they did not do it in a dastardly manner, nor without just provocation.

The sea coast of Sicily is very rich ; the sides of the mountains are highly cultivated, and present the most



most agreeable aspect that can be imagined ;—corn, wine, oil, and silk, all mixed together, and in the the greatest abundance : However, the cultivated part is but small in proportion to what is lying waste, and only serves to shew the immense fertility of this island, were it peopled, and in industrious hands. The side of the road is covered with a variety of flowers, and of flowering shrubs ; some of them exceedingly beautiful. The inclosures are many of them fenced with hedges of the Indian fig, or prickly pear ; as in Spain and Portugal ; and our guides assure us, that in many of the parched ravines round *Ætna*, there are plenty of trees which produce both cinnamon and pepper ; not so strong, they allow, as those of the spice islands, but which are sold to the merchants at a low price, by a set of banditti, who dress themselves like hermits : These spices are mixed with the true pepper and cinnamon from the Indies, and sent through all Europe.

The road from Messina to this place is extremely romantic. It lies the whole way along the coast, and commands the view of Calabria, and the south part of the Straits ; covered with chebecks, galleys, galliots, and a quantity of fishing boats. The view on the right hand is confined by high mountains, on the very summits of which they have built several considerable towns and villages, which with their churches and steeples make a very picturesque appearance. They have chosen this elevated situation, I suppose, with a double view ; both to protect them from their enemies, and from the violent heat of the climate : This forenoon we found it excessive, but had the finest swimming in the world before dinner ; which kept us cool and fresh for all the rest of the day. — We have likewise provided ourselves with excellent umbrellas, without which, at this season, travelling would be absolutely impracticable.

Between this and Messina, a little to the right, lie the mountains, formerly called the Nebrodes ; and

likewise the mountain of Neptune, which is reckoned the highest of this ridge. It is celebrated for a vast gulph or crater on its summit, from whence, at particular times, there issues an exceeding cold wind, with such violence that it is difficult to approach it. I was sorry to pass this singular mountain, but it would have delayed us a day or two; and we are hastening with impatience to a much greater object: It is now named *Il monte Scuderio*, and is said to be so high that the Adriatic can be seen from its summit. From the description they give of it, it appears evidently to be an old volcano. The river *Nisso* takes its rise from this mountain; it was renowned in antiquity for the gold found in its channel; for which reason, it was by the Greeks called *Chrysothoas*. It is said, the remains of the antient gold mines are still to be seen near the source of this river; but the modern masters of Sicily have never been enterprising enough to explore them. It was on this beautiful coast where the famous flocks of *Apollo* were kept by his two daughters, *Phaethusa* and *Lampetie*; the seizing of which by *Ulysses's* companions proved the cause of their deaths, and of all his subsequent misfortunes. The mountain of *Tauromina* is very high and steep, and the road up to it is exceedingly rugged.

This famous city is now reduced to an insignificant burgh; yet even these small remains give a very high idea of its former magnificence. The theatre, I think, is supposed to be the largest in the world. It appears to me greatly superior to that of *Adrian's villa*, near *Rome*. It is entire enough, to give a very tolerable idea of the Roman theatre, and indeed astonishes by its vastness; nor can I conceive how any voice could extend through the prodigious crowd it must have contained. I paced about one quarter of it, over the boxes that were intended for the women, which is not near the outward circle of all; (the rest is so broken,



broken, that I could get no farther.) It measured about 120 ordinary steps, so that you may conceive the immensity of the whole. The seats exactly front mount *Ætna*, which makes a glorious appearance from this place; and no doubt has often diverted their attention from the scene. — It arises from an immense base, and mounts equally on all sides to its summit: It is just now throwing out volumes of white smoke, which do not rise in the air, but seem to roll down the side of the mountain like a vast torrent. The ascent of *Ætna* on each side is reckoned about 30 miles, and the circumference of its base has been computed at 150; I think it does not appear to be so much; but I shall probably be enabled to give you a fuller account of it afterwards.

After admiring the great theatre of *Taurominum*, we went to examine the *Naumachia*, and the reservoirs for supplying it with water. About 150 paces of one side of the wall of the *Naumachia* remains; but as this is not compleat, there is no judging of its original magnitude. This is supposed to have been a large square, inclosed with strong walls, and capable of being filled with water on occasion; intended for the exhibition of sea-fights, and all naval exercises. There were four reservoirs for supplying this with water. All are upon the same grand scale. One of these is almost entire; it is supported by a vast number of strong pillars, in the same manner as those of *Titus's* baths at Rome, and several others you may have seen in Italy. — I would dwell longer on objects of this kind; but I am persuaded descriptions can give but a very imperfect idea of them; and to mark out the precise dimensions with a mathematical exactness, where there is nothing exceedingly remarkable, must surely be a very dry work, both to the writer and reader. I shall therefore content myself (I hope it will content you too) with endeavouring to communicate, as entire as possible, the same impression I

myself shall receive, without descending too much to particulars; or fatiguing myself or you with the enumeration of antique walls, merely because they are such, except where there is indeed something very striking, and different too, from what has already been described in Italy.

I own I despair of success:—Few things, I believe, in writing being more difficult than thus “*s’emparer de l’imagination*” to seize,—to make ourselves masters of the reader’s imagination, to carry it along with us through every scene, and make it in a manner congenial with our own; every prospect opening upon him with the same light, and arising in the same colours, and at the same instant too, as upon us: For where descriptions fail in this, the pleasure of reading them must be very trivial. Now, perhaps, this same journal stile is the most favourable of any, to produce these effects. — It is at least much the most agreeable to the writer; who never has his subject to seek, but needs only recollect what has passed since he last laid down the pen, and travel the day over again; and if he travels it to good purpose, it ought to be equally agreeable to the reader too, who thereby becomes one of the party, and bears a share in all the pleasures of the journey without suffering from the fatigues of it; or either losing his temper by the badness of the roads, or his skin by the badness of the saddles; which misfortunes some of us already labour under; and you will probably be the only one in the party exempted from them.

One of my greatest difficulties, I see, will be the finding proper places to write in; for the inns are altogether execrable, and there is no such thing as getting a room to one’s self:—I am just now writing on the end of a barrel, which I chose rather than the table, as it is farther removed from noise. I must therefore intreat, once for all, that you will excuse incorrectness and want of method. How can one be  
methodical



methodical upon a barrel?—It has ever been the most declared enemy to method.—You might as well expect a sermon from Bacchus, or a coherent speech from our friend lord —— after he has finished the third bottle. You will be pleased then just to take things as they occur.—Were I obliged to be strictly methodical, I should have no pleasure in writing you these letters; and then if my position is just, you could have no pleasure in reading them.

Our guards have procured us beds; though not in the town of Taurominum, but in Giardini, a village at the foot of the mountain on which it stands. The people are extremely attentive, and have produced us an excellent supper and good wine, which now waits—but shall wait no longer. Adieu. To-morrow we intend to climb mount Ætna on this (its east) side if we find it practicable.

Ever yours,

## LETTER VI.

Catania, May 24th.

**I** AM already almost two days in arrears. Yesterday we were so much fatigued with the abominable roads of mount Ætna, that I was not able to wield a pen; and to-day, I assure you, has by no means been a day of rest; however, I must not let it run on any farther, otherwise I shall never be able to make up my lee way. I am afraid you will suffer more from the fatigues of the journey than I at first apprehended.

We left Giardini at five o'clock. About half a mile farther the first region of mount Ætna begins, and here they have set up the statue of a saint, for having prevented the lava from running up the mountain of Taurominum, and destroying the adjacent country; which the people think it certainly must

have done, had it not been for this kind interposition; but he very wisely, as well as humanely, conducted it down a low valley to the sea.

We left the Catania road on the left, and began to ascend the mountain, in order to visit the celebrated tree, known by the name of *Il Castagno de Cento Cavalli* (the chestnut tree of an hundred horse) which for some centuries past has been looked upon as one of the greatest wonders of *Ætna*. We were likewise determined (if possible) to gain the summit of the mountain by this side, and to descend by the side of Catania; but we were soon convinced of the impossibility of this, and obliged, though with a good deal of reluctance, to relinquish that part of our scheme.

As we advanced in the first region of *Ætna*, we observed that there had been violent eruptions of fire all over this country at a very great distance from the summit, or principal crater of the mountain. On our road to the village of Piedmonte, I took notice of several very considerable craters, and stones of an immense size, scattered all around, that had been discharged from them. These stones are precisely such as are thrown out by the crater of mount Vesuvius; and indeed I think the lava too seems to be exactly of the same nature, though rather more porous.

The distance from Giardini to Piedmonte is only ten miles, but as the road is exceedingly rough and difficult, it took us near four hours to travel it. The barometer, which at Giardini (on the sea side) stood at 29 inches, 10 lines, had now fallen to 27 : 3. Farenheit's thermometer (made by Adams in London) 73 degrees. We found the people extremely curious and inquisitive to know our errand, which when we told, many of them offered to accompany us. Of these we chose two; and after drinking our tea, which was matter of great speculation to the inhabitants, who had never before seen a breakfast of this kind, we began to climb the mountain.

We



We were directed, for five or six miles of our road, by an aqueduct, which the prince of Palagonia has made, at a great expence, to supply Piedmonte with water. After we left the aqueduct, the ascent became a good deal more rapid, till we arrived at the beginning of the second region, called by the natives *Il Regione Sylvoſa*, or the woody region; because it is composed of one vast forest, that extends all around the mountain. Part of this was destroyed by a very singular phænomenon, not later than the year 1755.—During the eruption of the volcano, an immense torrent of boiling water issued, as is imagined, from the great crater of the mountain, and in an instant poured down to its base, overwhelming and ruining every thing it met with in its course. Our conductors shewed us the traces of this torrent, which are still very visible; but are now beginning to recover verdure and vegetation, which for some time appeared to have been annihilated. The track it has left seems to be about a mile and a half broad; and in some places still more.

The common received opinion, I find, is, that this water was raised by the power of suction, through some communication betwixt the volcano and the sea; the absurdity of which is too glaring to need a refutation.—The power of suction alone, even supposing a perfect vacuum, could never raise water to more than thirty-three or thirty-four feet, which is equal to the weight of a column of air, the whole height of the atmosphere. But this phænomenon, I should imagine, might be very easily accounted for; either by a stream of lava falling suddenly into one of the vallies of snow, that occupy the higher regions of the mountain, and melting it down; or, what I think is still more probable, that the melted snow, finding vast caverns, and reservoirs in the mountain, where it is lodged for some time, till the excessive heat of the lava below bursts the sides of these caverns, and produces

duces this phænomenon, which has been matter of great speculation to the Sicilian philosophers, and has employed the pens of several of them. The same thing happened in an eruption of Vesuvius last century, and in an instant swept away about 500 people, who were marching in procession at the foot of the mountain, to implore the mediation of St. Januarius.

Near to this we passed through some beautiful woods of cork and ever-green oak, growing absolutely out of the lava, the soil having as yet hardly filled the crevices of that porous substance; and not a great way farther, I observed several little mountains that seemed to have been formed by a late eruption. I dismounted from my mule, and climbed to the top of them all. They are seven in number; every one of them with a regular cup or crater on the top, and in some the great gulph or (as they call it) *Voragine*, that discharged the burnt matter of which these little mountains are formed, is still open. I tumbled down large stones into these gulphs, and heard the noise for a long time after.—All the fields round, to a considerable distance, are covered with large burnt stones discharged from these little volcanos.

From this place, it is not less than five or six miles to the great chestnut-trees, through forests growing out of the lava, in several places almost impassable. Of these trees there are many of an enormous size; but the Castagno de Cento Cavalli is by much the most celebrated. I have even found it marked in an old map of Sicily, published near an hundred years ago; and in all the maps of *Ætna*, and its environs, it makes a very conspicuous figure. I own I was by no means struck with its appearance, as it does not seem to be one tree, but a bush of five large trees growing together. We complained to our guides of the imposition; when they unanimously assured us, that by the universal tradition and even testimony of the



the country, all these were once united in one stem; that their grandfathers remembered this, when it was looked upon as the glory of the forest, and visited from all quarters; that for many years past it had been reduced to the venerable ruin we beheld. We began to examine it with more attention, and found that there is an appearance that these five trees were really once united in one. The opening in the middle is at present prodigious; and it does indeed require faith to believe, that so vast a space was once occupied by solid timber.—But there is no appearance of bark on the inside of any of the stumps, nor on the sides that are opposite to one another. Mr. Glover and I measured it separately, and brought it exactly to the same size; viz. 204 feet round. If this was once united in one solid stem, it must with justice indeed have been looked upon as a very wonderful phænomenon in the vegetable world, and was deservedly stiled, the glory of the forest.

I have since been told by the Cannonico Recupero, an ingenious ecclesiastic of this place, that he was at the expence of carrying up peasants with tools to dig round the Castagno de Cento Cavalli, and he assures me, upon his honour, that he found all these stems united below ground in one root. I alledged that so extraordinary an object must have been celebrated by many of their writers.—He told me that it had, and produced several examples; Philoteo, Carrera, and some others. Carrera begs to be excused from telling its dimensions, but he says, he is sure there was wood enough in that one tree to build a large palace. Their poet Bagolini too has celebrated a tree of the same kind, perhaps the same tree\*; and Massa, one

\* *Supremos inter montes monstrosior omni  
Monstrofi sætum stipitis Etna dedit.  
Castaneam genuit, cujus modo concava cortex  
Turmam equitum haud parvum continet, atque greges, &c.*

of their most esteemed authors, says he has seen solid oaks upwards of 40 feet round; but adds, that the size of the chestnut trees was beyond belief, the hollow of one of which, he says, contained 300 sheep; and 30 people had often been in it on horseback. I shall not pretend to say, that this is the same tree he means; or whether it ever was one tree or not. There are many others that are well deserving the curiosity of travellers. One of these, about a mile and a half higher on the mountain, is called *Il Castagno del Galea*; it rises from one solid stem to a considerable height, after which it branches out, and is a much finer object than the other. I measured it about two feet from the ground; it was 76 feet round. There is a third called *Il Castagno del Nave*, that is pretty nearly of the same size. All these grow on a thick rich soil, formed originally, I believe, of ashes thrown out by the mountain.

The climate here is much more temperate than in the first region of *Ætna*, where the excessive heats must ever prevent a very luxuriant vegetation. I found the barometer had now fallen to 26: 5½; which announces an elevation of very near 4000 feet; equivalent, in the opinion of some of the French academicians, to 18 or 20 degrees of latitude in the formation of a climate.

The vast quantity of nitre contained in the ashes of *Ætna*, probably contributes greatly to increase the luxuriance of this vegetation; and the air too, strongly impregnated with it from the smoke of the volcano, must create a constant supply of this salt, termed by some, not without reason, the food of vegetables.

There is a house built in the inside of the great chestnut tree for holding the fruit it bears, which is still very considerable; here we dined with excellent appetite, and being thoroughly convinced, that it was in vain

to



to attempt getting up the mountain on that side, we began to descend; and after a very fatiguing journey over old lavas, now become fertile fields and rich vineyards, we arrived about sunset at *Jaci Reale*, where, with the utmost difficulty, we at last got lodging in a convent of Dominicans.

The last lava we crossed, before our arrival there, is of a vast extent; I thought we never should have had done with it; it certainly is not less than six or seven miles broad, and appears in many places to be of an enormous depth.

When we came near the sea, I was desirous to see what form it had assumed in meeting with the water. I went to examine it, and found it had drove back the waves for upwards of a mile, and had formed a large black high promontory, where before it was deep water. This lava, I imagined, from its barrenness (for it is as yet covered with a very scanty soil) had run from the mountain but a few ages ago; but was surprised to be informed by Signor Recupero, the historiographer of *Ætna*, that this very lava is mentioned by Diodorus Siculus to have burst from *Ætna* in the time of the second Punic war, when Syracuse was besieged by the Romans.—A detachment was sent from Taurominum to the relief of the besieged. They were stopped on their march by this stream of lava, which had reached the sea before their arrival at the foot of the mountain, and entirely cut off their passage, and obliged them to return by the back of *Ætna*, upwards of 100 miles about. His authority for this, he tells me, was taken from inscriptions on Roman monuments found on this lava, and that it was likewise well ascertained by many of the old Sicilian authors. Now, as this is about 2000 years ago, one would have imagined, if lavas have a regular progress in becoming fertile fields, that this must long ago have become at least arable: this however is not the case, and it is as yet only covered with a very scanty vegetation, being  
incapable

incapable either of producing corn or vines. There are indeed pretty large trees growing in the crevices, which are full of a very rich earth, but in all probability it will be some hundred years yet before there is enough of this to render it of any use to the proprietors.

It is curious to consider, that the surface of this black and barren matter, in process of time becomes, without exception, the most fertile soil upon earth : But what time must it require to bring it to its utmost perfection, when after 2000 years it is still in most places but a barren rock ?—Its progress is possibly as follows : The lava being a very porous substance, easily catches the dust that is carried about by the wind ; which at first, I observed, only forms a kind of moss ; this, by degrees, increasing the soil, small meagre vegetables are produced, which rotting in their turn, are likewise converted into soil. But this progress, I suppose, is often greatly accelerated by showers of ashes from the mountain ; as I have observed in some places the richest soil, to the depth of five or six feet and upwards, and still below that, nothing but rocks of lava. It is in these spots that the trees arrive at such an immense size. Their roots shoot into the crevices of the lava, and lay such hold of it, that there is no instance of the wind's tearing them up ; though there are many of its breaking off their immense branches.—A branch of one of the great chestnut trees, where we passed yesterday, has fallen exactly over a deep gully, where there is a pretty large rivulet, and formed a very commodious bridge. The people say it was done by St. Agatha, the guardian saint of the mountain, who has the superintendence of all its operations.

In the lowest part of the first region of *Ætna*, the harvest is almost over ; but in the upper parts of the same region, near the confines of the *Regione Sylvo-*sa, it will not begin yet for several weeks.

The



The reapers, as we went along, abused us from all quarters, and more excellent blackguards I have never met with; though indeed, in general, our guides were a full match for them. They began so soon as we were within hearing, and did not finish till we were got quite without reach of their voices; which they extended as much as they possibly could. As it was all in Sicilian, we could make very little of it, but by the interpretation of our guides; however we could not help admiring the vast volubility and natural elocution with which they spoke. This custom is as old as the time of the Romans, and probably much older, as it is mentioned by Horace, and others of their authors. It is still in vogue here as much as ever; the masters encourage it; they think it gives them spirits, and makes the work go on more chearfully; and I believe they are right, for it is amazing what pleasure they seemed to take in it, and what laughing and joy it occasioned.

I forgot to mention that we passed the source of the famous cold river (*il fiume Freddo*.) This is the river so celebrated by the poets in the fable of Acis and Galatea. It was here that Acis was supposed to have been killed by Poliphemus, and the gods out of compassion converted him into this river; which still retaining the terror inspired by the dreadful voice of Poliphemus, runs with great velocity, and about a mile from its source throws itself into the sea. It rises at once out of the earth a large stream. Its water is remarkably pure, and so excessively cold, that it is reckoned dangerous to drink it; but I am told it has likewise a poisonous quality, which proceeds from its being strongly impregnated with vitriol, to such a degree, that cattle have often been killed by it. It never freezes; but, what is remarkable, it often contracts a degree of cold superior to that of ice.

These

These particulars I was informed of by the priests at Aci; which place, anciently called Aci Aquileia, and several others near it, Aci Castello, Aci Terra, &c. take their names from the unfortunate shepherd Acis.

A little to the east of the river Acis, is the mouth of the river Alcantara, one of the most considerable in the island. It takes its rise on the north side of mount *Ætna*, and marks out the boundary of the mountain for about sixty miles. Its course has been stopped, in many places, by the eruptions of the volcano; so that, strictly speaking, the skirts of *Ætna* extend much beyond it; though it has generally been considered as the boundary. We passed it on our way to Piedmonte, over a large bridge built entirely of lava; and near to this the bed of the river is continued for a great way, through one of the most remarkable, and probably one of the most ancient lavas that ever run from *Ætna*. In many places the current of the river, which is extremely rapid, has worn down the solid lava to the depth of 50 or 60 feet. *Recupero*, the gentleman I have mentioned, who is engaged in writing the natural history of *Ætna*, tells me, he had examined this lava with great attention, and he thinks that its course, including all its windings, is not less than 40 miles. It issued from a large mountain on the north side of *Ætna*, and finding some vallies that lay to the east, it took its course that way, interrupting the river Alcantara in many places, and at last arrived at the sea, not far from the mouth of that river.

The city of Jaci, or Aci, and indeed all the towns on this coast, are founded on immense rocks of lava, heaped one above another, in some places to an amazing height; for it appears that these flaming torrents, so soon as they arrived at the sea, were hardened into rock, which not yielding any longer to the pressure of the liquid fire behind; that continuing to accumulate, formed a dam of fire, which in a short time



time run over the solid front, pouring a second torrent into the ocean : this was immediately consolidated, and succeeded by a third, and so on.

Many of the places on this coast still retain their antient names ; but the properties ascribed to them by the antients are now no more. The river Acis, which is now so poisonous, was celebrated for the sweetness and salubrity of its waters \*; which, Theocritus says, were ever held sacred by the Sicilian shepherds.

We were surprised to find that so many places retained the name of this swain, who I imagined had never existed, but in the imagination of the poets : But the Sicilian authors say, that Acis was the name of a king who reigned in this part of the island, in the time of the most remote antiquity ; in confirmation of which, Massa gives the translation of an inscription found near Aci Castello †. He is said to have been slain in a fit of jealousy by Polyphemus, one of the giants of Ætna ; which gave rise to the fable.—Anguillara, a Sicilian poet, in relating this story, gives a tremendous idea of the voice of Polyphemus ; the passage has been greatly admired.

“ Tremo per troppo horrore Etna ; e Tifeo  
 “ Fece maggior la fiamma uscir del monte ;  
 “ E Pacchino, e Peloro, e Lilibeo  
 “ Quasi attuffar nel mar l’altera fronte ;

\* Quique per Etnæos Acis petit æquora fines,  
 Et dulce gratum Nereide perluit unda.

SIL. ITAL.

† D I Æ  
 O G N I Æ, S A T U R N I Æ, Æ T N Æ Æ,  
 D E O R U M,  
 M A R T I, F I L I Æ, U X O R I,  
 I N P O R T U  
 S E P U L C H R U M, T E M P L U M, E T A R C E M  
 A C I S,  
 F A U N I F I L I U S, P I C I N E P O S,  
 S A T U R N I P R O N E P O S,  
 L A T I N I F R A T E R.

“ Cadde

- “ Cadde il martel di man nel monte Etneo,  
 “ All Re di Lenno, a Sterope, e a Bronte;  
 “ Fugir fiere & augei di lor ricetto  
 “ E si strinse ogni madre il figlio al Petto.”

You will easily observe, however, that the Sicilian poet cannot in justice claim the entire merit of these lines, as they are evidently taken from Virgil's description of the sound of Alecto's horn in the seventh Eneid. The last line, perhaps the most beautiful of the whole, is almost word for word.

“ Et trepidæ matres pressere ad pectora natos.

It has been observed too, by some critics, that even this description of Virgil is not his own, but copied exactly from the account that Apollonius Rhodius gives of the roaring of the dragon that guarded the golden fleece; so that you see there is nothing new under the sun. Rhodius probably stole it from somebody else, and so on.—Poets have ever been the greatest of all thieves; and happy it is that poetical theft is no felony, otherwise, I am afraid, Parnassus would have been but thinly peopled.

We are now going to deliver our credentials, and make some great visits:—I wish they were over; for of all occupations in life, this is surely the most tedious and irksome, when we are not lucky enough to meet with people of sense:—For we have ever found that the shallowest, and least worth the knowing, are those of the most difficult access.—Fools of rank generally make a screen of their dignity, to conceal their emptiness. We have met with strong instances of this in the course of our peregrinations:—Whereas men of real parts, and liberality of sentiment, scorn to make use of these specious and imposing advantages that rank bestows;—and never think of skulking behind their nobility, which they consider as a species of cowardice, and unbecoming the character of a gentleman.—I remember a great German  
 baron



baron, who was likewise commandant of a frontier town; one of the dullest, and proudest fellows upon earth.—Whenever the company were getting into spirits, he construed it as a want of deference to his dignity; and never failed to throw a damp on their mirth, either by putting them in mind that he was baron of G—, or commandant of the city.—Sometimes he sent for the officer of the guard, and made him stand bowing an hour in his presence:—Sometimes his agent came in loaded with parchments, and talked to him of his lands, his castles, and his manors; during which time the best part of the company generally slipped off, cursing the pride and stupidity of their entertainer, and wishing him buried under his lands, his castles, and his manors.—If the commandant of Catania is of this stamp, we shall make him but a short visit.—Farewell; to morrow I shall endeavour to bring you up with us; for at present you will please to observe, that you have got no farther than the city of Jaci; and have still many extinguished volcanos to pass before your arrival here.

Ever yours, &c.

## LETTER VII.

Catania, May 25th.

**T**HE road from Jaci to this city is entirely over lava, and consequently very fatiguing and troublesome. Within a few miles of that place, we counted eight mountains formed by eruption, with every one its crater, from whence the burnt matter was discharged. Some of these are very high, and of a great compass. It appears evidently, that the eruptions of mount *Ætna* have formed the whole of this coast, and in many places have driven back the sea for several miles from its antient boundary. The account

the Sicilian authors give of the conflict betwixt these two adverse elements is truly tremendous; and in relating it; they seem to have been shook with horror. Conceive the front of a torrent of fire, ten miles in breadth, and heaped up to an enormous height, rolling down the mountain; and at once pouring its flames into the ocean!—The noise, they assure us, is infinitely more dreadful than the loudest thunder; and is heard through the whole country to an immense distance. The water seemed to retire and diminish before the fire, and to confess its superiority; yielding up its possessions, and contracting its banks, to make room for its imperious master, who commands it: “Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther.”—The clouds of salt vapour darken the face of the sun, covering up this scene, under a veil of horror and of night; and laying waste every field and vineyard in these regions of the island. The whole fish on the coast are destroyed, the colour of the sea itself is changed, and the transparency of its waters lost for many months.

There are three rocks of lava at some little distance from shore, which Pliny takes frequent notice of, and calls them the Three Cyclops. It is pretty singular, that they are still distinguished by the same name.

The fate of Catania has been very remarkable, and will ever appear fabulous. It is situated immediately at the foot of this great volcano, and has been several times destroyed by it: That indeed is not extraordinary; it would have been much more so if it had escaped; but what I am going to relate, is a singularity that probably never happened to any city but itself. It was always in great want of a port, till by an eruption in the 16th century; and no doubt, by the interposition of St. Agatha, what was denied them by nature, they received from the generosity of the mountain. A stream of lava, running into the sea,  
formed



formed a mole which no expence could have given them. This lasted for some time a safe and commodious harbour, till at last, by a subsequent eruption, it was entirely filled up and demolished; so that probably the poor saint had much sunk in her credit.— For at this unfortunate period, her miraculous veil, looked upon as the greatest treasure of Catania, and esteemed an infallible remedy against earthquakes and volcanos, seems to have lost its virtue. The torrent burst over the walls, sweeping away the images of every saint that were placed there to oppose it; and, laying waste great part of this beautiful city, poured into the sea. However, the people say, that at that time they had given their saint very just provocation, but that she has long ago been reconciled to them, and has promised never to allow the mountain to get the better of them for the future. Many of them are so thoroughly convinced of this (for they are extremely superstitious) that I really believe if the lava was at their walls, they would not be at the pains to remove their effects. Neither is it the veil of St. Agatha alone that they think possessed of this wonderful dominion over the mountain; but every thing that has touched it, they suppose is impregnated in a lesser degree with the same miraculous properties. Thus there are a number of little bits of cotton and linen that are fixed to the veil; which, after being blessed by the bishop, are supposed to have power enough to save any person's house or garden; and wherever this expedient has failed, it is always ascribed to the want of faith of the person, not any want of efficacy in the veil. However, they tell many stories of these bits of cotton being fixed to the walls of houses and vineyards, and preserving them entirely from the conflagration.

On our arrival at Catania, we were amazed to find, that in so noble and beautiful a city, there was no such thing as an inn. Our guides, indeed, con-

ducted us to a house they called such ; but it was so wretchedly mean and dirty, that we immediately determined to look out for other lodgings; and by the assistance of the Canonico Recupero, for whom we had letters, we soon found ourselves comfortably lodged in a convent. The prince of Biscaris (the governor of the place) a person of very great merit and distinction, returned our visit this forenoon, and made us the most obliging offers.

Signor Recupero, who engages to be our Cicerone, has shewn us some curious remains of antiquity; but they have been all so shaken and shattered by the mountain, that hardly any thing is to be found entire.

Near to a vault, which is now thirty feet below ground, and has probably been a burial place, there is a draw-well, where there are several strata of lavas, with earth to a considerable thickness over the surface of each stratum. Recupero has made use of this as an argument to prove the vast antiquity of the eruptions of this mountain. For if it requires two thousand years or upwards, to form but a scanty soil on the surface of a lava, there must have been more than that space of time betwixt each of the eruptions that has formed these strata. But what shall we say of a pit they sunk near to Jaci of a great depth. They pierced through seven distinct lavas one over the other, the surfaces of which were parallel, and most of them covered with a thick bed of fine rich earth. Now, says he, the eruption that formed the lowest of these lavas, if we may be allowed to reason from analogy, must have flowed from the mountain at least 14,000 years ago.

Recupero tells me he is exceedingly embarrassed, by these discoveries, in writing the history of the mountain.—That Moses hangs like a dead weight upon him, and blunts all his zeal for inquiry; for that really he has not the conscience to make his mountain so young as that prophet makes the world.—

What



What do you think of these sentiments from a Roman Catholic divine?—The bishop, who is strenuously orthodox—for it is an excellent see—has already warned him to be upon his guard, and not pretend to be a better natural historian than Moses; nor to presume to urge any thing that may in the smallest degree be deemed contradictory to his sacred authority. Adieu.

Ever yours.

### L E T T E R VIII.

Catania, May 26th.

**T**HIS morning we went to see the house and museum of the prince of Biscaris; which, in antiques, is inferior to none I have ever seen, except that of the king of Naples at Portici. What adds greatly to the value of these is, that the prince himself has had the satisfaction of seeing most of them brought to light. He has dug them out of the ruins of the antient theatre of Catania, at an incredible expence and trouble; but happily his pains have been amply repaid, by the number and variety of curious objects he has discovered. It would be endless to enter into an enumeration of them; even during our short stay, we had the satisfaction of seeing part of a rich Corinthian cornice, and several pieces of statues, produced again to the light of the sun, after lying for so many ages in darkness and oblivion. The collection of medals, cameos, and intaglios are likewise very princely, and so are the articles in natural history; but the polite and amiable behaviour of the owner, gives more pleasure than all his curiosities. He did not, ostentatiously, like the prince of Villa Franca, tell us, that his house and carriages were at our command;—but, without any hint being given of it, we found his coach waiting at our

door; and we shall probably be obliged to make use of it during our stay. His family consists of the princess his wife, a son, and a daughter, who seem to emulate each other in goodness and benignity.— They put me in mind of some happy families I have seen in our own country, but resemble nothing we have yet met with on the continent. He is just now building a curious villa on a promontory formed by the lava of 1669. The spot where the house stands, was formerly at least 50 feet deep of water; and the height of the lava above the present level of the sea, is not less than 50 more.

This afternoon I walked out alone to examine the capricious forms and singular appearances that this destructive branch has assumed in laying waste the country. I had not gone far when I spied a magnificent building at some distance, which seemed to be founded on the highest part of it. My curiosity led me on, as I had heard no mention of any palace on this side of the city. On entering the great gate, my astonishment was a good deal increased on observing a façade almost equal to that of Versailles; a noble staircase of white marble, and every thing that announced a royal magnificence. I had never heard that the kings of Sicily had a palace at Catania, and yet I could not account for what I saw in any other way. I thought the vast front before me had been the whole of the palace; but conceive my amazement, when on turning the corner, I found another front of equal magnitude; and discovered that what I had seen was only one side of an immense square.

I was no longer in doubt, well knowing that the church alone could be mistress of such magnificence. I hastened home to communicate this discovery to my friends; when I found the Canonico Recupero already with them. He abused me exceedingly for presuming to go out without our Cicerone, and declared  
he



he had never been so much disappointed in his life; as he had come on purpose to carry us there, and to enjoy our surprise and astonishment. He told us (what I well knew before) that it was no other than a convent of fat Benedictine monks; who were determined to make sure of a paradise, at least in this world, if not in the other. He told us they were worth about 15,000*l.* a year; an immense sum indeed for this country!

We went with Recupero to pay our respects to these sons of humility, temperance, and mortification; and we must own, they received and entertained us with great civility and politeness, and even without ostentation. Their museum is little inferior to that of the prince of Biscaris, and the apartments that contain it are infinitely more magnificent. But their garden is the greatest curiosity:—Although it is formed on the rugged and barren surface of the lava, it has a variety and a neatness that is seldom to be met with. The walks are large, and paved with flints; and the trees and hedges, (which by the bye are in a bad taste, and cut into a number of very ridiculous shapes) thrive exceedingly. The whole of the soil must have been brought from a great distance, as the surface of this lava (only 150 years old) is as hard and bare as a piece of iron. The church belonging to this convent, were it finished, will be one of the finest in Europe; but as it is entirely founded on the surface of the porous and brittle lava, part of this foundation has given way to the immense pressure of so huge a fabric; and several of the large arches, that were intended to form the different chapels, have already fallen down. Only the west limb of the cross (not a fifth of the whole) is finished; and even this alone makes a noble and magnificent church. Here they have the finest organ I ever heard, even superior, I think, to the famous one at Harlem.

We went next to examine where the lava had scaled the walls of Catania. It must have been a

noble sight. The walls are 64 palms high, (near 60 feet) and of great strength; otherwise they must have been borne down by the force of the flaming matter which rose over this height, and seems to have mounted considerably above the top of the wall before it made its entry; at last it came down, sweeping before it every saint in the calendar, who were drawn up in order of battle on purpose to oppose its passage; and marching on in triumph, annihilated, in a manner, every object that dared to oppose it. Amongst other things it covered up some fine fountains; one of which was so much esteemed, that they have at a great expence pierced through the lava, and have now recovered their favourite spring. This excavation is a very curious work, and worthy of the attention of travellers.

Catania is looked upon as one of the most antient cities in the island, or indeed in the world.—Their legends say, that it was founded by the Cyclops, or giants of *Ætna*, supposed to have been the first inhabitants of Sicily after the deluge; and some of the Sicilian writers pretend that it was built by Deucalion and Pyrrha so soon as the waters subsided, and they had got down again to the foot of the mountain. Its antient name was *Catetna*, or the city of *Ætna*.

It is now reckoned the third city in the kingdom; though since Messina was destroyed by the plague, it may well be looked upon as the second. It contains upwards of 30,000 inhabitants; has an university, the only one in the island; and a bishoprick. The bishop's revenues are very considerable, and arise principally from the sale of the snow on mount *Ætna*. One small portion of which, lying on the north of the mountain, is said to bring him in upwards of 1000*l.* a year; for *Ætna* furnishes snow and ice, not only to the whole island of Sicily, but likewise to Malta and a great part of Italy, and makes a very considerable branch of commerce; for even the peasants in these hot countries re-  
gale



gale themselves with ices during the summer heats; and there is no entertainment given by the nobility, of which these do not always make a principal part: a famine of snow, they themselves say, would be more grievous, than a famine of either corn or wine. It is a common observation amongst them, which I have often heard repeated, that without the snows of mount *Ætna*, their island could not be inhabited; so essential has this article of luxury become to them. But *Ætna* not only keeps them cool in summer, but likewise keeps them warm in winter; the fuel for the greatest part of the island being carried from the immense and inexhaustible forests of this volcano, and constitutes too a very large branch of commerce.—But this amazing mountain perpetually carries me away from my subject; I was speaking of this city—What of it was spared by the eruption 1669, was totally ruined by the fatal earthquake 1693; when the greatest part of its inhabitants were buried under the walls of their houses and churches; yet, after such repeated, and such dismal disasters, so strange is their infatuation, that they never could be prevailed upon to change their situation. The whole city was soon rebuilt, after a new and elegant plan, and is now much handsomer than ever. There is not a shadow of a doubt, that in some future commotion of the mountain, it will be again laid in ashes. But at present they are in perfect security: The Virgin and St. Agatha have both engaged to protect them; and they hold *Ætna*, with all the devils it contains, at defiance.

There are many remains of antiquity in this city, but indeed most of them are in a very ruinous state. One of the most remarkable is an elephant of lava, with an obelisk of Egyptian granite on his back. There are likewise considerable remains of a great theatre, besides the one belonging to the prince of Biscaris; a large bath almost intire; the ruins of the great aqueduct, 18 miles long; the ruins of several

ral temples, one of Ceres, another of Vulcan ;—the church called *Bocca di Fuoco* was likewise a temple. But the most entire of all, is a small rotundo, which, as well as the Pantheon at Rome, and some others to be met with in Italy, in my opinion, demonstrates that form to be the most durable of all.

It has now been purged and purified from all the infection contracted from the heathen rites, and is become a christian church, dedicated to the blessed Virgin; who has long been constituted universal legate, and executrix to all the antient goddesses, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal: and, indeed, little more than the names are changed; the things continue pretty much the same as ever.—The catholics themselves do not attend to it: But it is not a little curious to consider, how small is the deviation in almost every article of their present rites from those of the antients. I have somewhere seen an observation which seems to be a just one: That during the long reign of heathenism, superstition had altogether exhausted her talent for invention; and when a superstitious spirit seized christians, they were under a necessity of borrowing from their predecessors, and imitating some part of their idolatry. This appears to be literally the case. I took notice of it to Signor R——, who is not the most zealous sectary in the world, and who frankly owned the truth of the observation.

In some places the very same images still remain: They have only christened them; and what was Venus or Proserpine, is now Mary Magdalene, or the Virgin. The same ceremonies are daily performed before these images, in the same language, and nearly in the same manner. The saints are perpetually coming down in person, and working miracles, as the heathen gods did of old. The walls of the temples are covered over with the vows of pilgrims, as they were formerly. The holy water, which was held in such detestation by the first christians, is again revered,



red, and sprinkled about with the same devotion as in the time of paganism. The same incense is burned, by priests arrayed in the same manner, with the same grimaces and genuflections, before the same images, and in the same temples too.—In short, so nearly do the rites coincide, that were the pagan high priest to come back, and re-assume his functions, he would only have to learn a few new names; to get the Mass, the Paters, and the Avas by heart; which would be much easier to him, as they are in a language he understands, but which his modern successors are often ignorant of. Some things, to be sure, would puzzle him; and he would swear that all the mysteries of Eleusis were nothing to the amazing mystery of transubstantiation;—the only one that ever attempted to set both our understanding and our senses at defiance, and baffles equally all the faculties both of the soul and body.—He would, likewise, be a good deal at a loss to account for the strange metamorphosis of some of his old friends. That (he would say) I can well remember, was the statue of Venus Meretrix, and was only worshipped by the loose and voluptuous. She seems to be wonderfully improved since you made her a christian; for I find she is now become the great protectress of sanctity and virtue—Juno too, who was so implacable and so revengeful, you have softened down into a very moderate sort of deity; for I observe you address her with as little fear or ceremony as any of the rest of them;—I wish you would make the Furies christians too, for sure they would be much the better for it.—But observing the figure of St. Anthony, he would exclaim with astonishment—But what do I behold!—Jupiter,—the sovereign of gods and men, with a ragged cloak over his shoulders!—What a humiliating spectacle!—Well do I remember with what awe we bent before that once respectable

pectable image.—But what has become of the thunderbolt, which he held in his hand to chastise the world; and what is that he has got in its place?—His conductor would tell him, that it was only a piece of rope, with knots upon it, to chastise himself;—adding, that he was now doing penance for his long usurpation;—and that the thunder had long ago been put into much better hands.—However, he would soon find, that even these saints very often change their names, according to the enthusiastic caprice of the people; and from this versatility, he would still be in hopes, in process of time, to see his friend Jupiter re-assume his bolt and his dignity.

Do you remember old Huet,—the greatest of all originals? One day, as he passed the statue of Jupiter in the capitol, he pulled off his hat, and made him a low bow.—A Jacobite gentleman, who observed it, asked him why he paid so much respect to that old gentleman?—For the same reason, replied Huet, that you pay so much respect to the Pretender. Besides, added he, I think, there is rather a greater probability that his turn will come round again than that of your hero; I shall therefore endeavour to keep well with him, and hope he will never forget that I took notice of him in the time of his adversity.

Indeed, within the course of my own observation, I can recollect some of the most capital saints in the kalendar, who have been disgraced by the people, and new names given to their statues.—When we were in Portugal last war, the people of Castel Branco were so enraged at St. Antonio, for allowing the Spaniards to plunder their town, contrary, as they affirmed, to his express agreement with them, that they broke many of his statues to pieces; and one that had been more revered than the rest, they took the head off, and clapped on one of St. Francis in its place; whose name the statue ever after retained.—Even the great  
St.



St. Januarius himself, I am told, was in very imminent danger during the last famine at Naples.—A Swiss gentleman assured me, that he had heard them load him with abuse and invective; and declared point blank, that if he did not procure them corn by such a time, he should no longer be their saint.—However, such instances are but rare; and in general the poor catholics are fully indemnified for these sudden fits of passion and resentment, from the full persuasion of the immediate presence and protection of their beloved patrons.

I have observed, with pleasure, that glow of gratitude and affection that has animated their countenances; and am persuaded that the warmth of enthusiastic devotion they often feel before their favourite saints, particularly their female ones, must have something extremely delightful in it;—resembling, perhaps, the pure and delicate sensations of the most respectful love. I own I have sometimes envied them their feelings; and in my heart cursed the pride of reason and philosophy, with all its cool and tasteless triumphs, that lulls into a kind of stoical apathy these most exquisite sensations of the soul.—Who would not choose to be deceived, when the deception raises in him these delicious passions, that are so worthy of the human heart; and for which, of all others, it seems to be the most fitted?—But if once you have steeled it over with the hard and impenetrable temper of philosophy; these fine-spun threads of weakness and affection, that were so pliable, and so easily tied, become hard and inflexible; and for ever lose that delicate tone of sensibility that put them into a kind of unison and vibration with every object around us: for it is certainly true, what has been said of one part of our species, and may almost with equal justice be applied to the whole,

“ That to their weakness half their charms we owe.”

I remember

I remember Doctor Tissot told me, he had a patient that actually died of love for Christ; and when in the last extremity, seemed still to enjoy the greatest happiness, calling upon him with all the fondness of the most enthusiastic passion. And from what I have often observed before the statues of the Virgin and St. Agatha, I am persuaded, they have many inamoratos that would willingly lay down their lives for them.

Now, pray, don't you think too, that this personal kind of worship is much better adapted to the capacities of the vulgar, than the more pure and sublime modes of it, which would only distract and confound their simple understandings, unaccustomed to speculation, and that certainly require something gross and material, some object of sense, to fix their attention?—This even seems to have been the opinion of some of the sacred writers, who often represent God under some material form.

Were you to attempt to give a country fellow an idea of the Deity;—were you to tell him of a being that is immaterial, and yet whose essence penetrates all matter;—who has existed from all eternity, and whose extension is equally boundless with his duration;—who fills and pervades millions of worlds, and animates every object they contain; and who, in the sublime language of our poet,

- “ Tho' chang'd thro' all, is yet in all the same,
- “ Great in the earth, as in th' ætherial frame :
- “ Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
- “ Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees ;
- “ Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent ;
- “ Spreads undivided, operates unspent.
- “ To him no high, no low, no great, no small,
- “ He fills, he bounds, connects and equals all.”

Now, what do you imagine he would think of such a being? I am afraid his understanding would be so bewildered that he could not think at all.—But set up before him the figure of a fine woman, with a beautiful



tiful child in her arms ; and tell him that she can procure him every thing he wants ;—he knows perfectly what he is about ; feels himself animated by the object, and prays to her with all his might.

Adieu—We are going to be very busy ; and are preparing every thing for one of the greatest objects of our expedition ;—the examination of mount *Ætna*. Indeed we have received very bad encouragement ;—and are beginning to doubt of the possibility of success. *Recupero* tells us, that the season is not far enough advanced yet, by some months ; and that he does not think it will be possible to get near the summit of the mountain. The last winter, he says, was so uncommonly severe, that the circle of snow extended much nearer the foot of the mountain than usual ; that although this circle is now greatly contracted, it still reaches at least to the distance of nine or ten miles around the crater.—He advises us to return this way in the month of August ; and, if possible, make *Ætna* the last part of our expedition.—If we do not succeed to-morrow, we shall probably follow his advice ; but we are all determined to make a bold push for it.—The weather is the most favourable that can be imagined ;—here is a delightful evening ; and by the star-light we can observe the smoke rolling down the side of the mountain like a vast torrent. *Recupero* says, this is a sure indication of the violence of the cold in these exalted regions of the atmosphere, which condenses the vapour, and makes it fall down, the moment it issues out of the crater. He advises us, by all means, to provide plenty of *liqueurs*, warm fur cloaks, and hatches to cut wood ; as we shall probably be obliged to pass the night in the open air, in a climate, he assures us, as cold as that of Greenland. It is very singular if this is true ; for at present we are melting with heat, in thin suits of taffeta.—Adieu. You shall know it all on our return, if we do not share the fate of *Empedocles*.

Ever yours.

LETTER

## L E T T E R IX.

Catania, May 29th.

ON the 27th, by day-break, we set off to visit mount Ætna, that venerable and respectable father of mountains. His base, and his immense declivities, are covered over with a numerous progeny of his own: For every great eruption produces a new mountain; and perhaps by the number of these, better than by any other method, the number of eruptions, and the age of Ætna itself, might be ascertained.

The whole mountain is divided into three distinct regions, called *La Regione Culta*, or *Piedmontese*, The Fertile Region; *La Regione Sylvosa*, or *Nemorosa*, The Woody Region; and *La Regione Deserta*, or *Scoperta*, The Barren Region.

These three are as different, both in climate and productions, as the three zones of the earth, and perhaps, with equal propriety, might have been stiled the Torrid, the Temperate, and the Frigid zone. The first region surrounds the foot of the mountain, and forms the most fertile country in the world on all sides of it, to the height of about fourteen or fifteen miles (where the woody region begins.) It is composed almost entirely of lava, which, after a great number of ages, is at last converted into the most fertile of all soils. At Nicolosi, which is twelve miles up the mountain, we found the barometer at  $27 : 1 \frac{1}{2}$ ; at Catania it stood at  $29 : 8 \frac{1}{2}$ ; although the former elevation is not very great, probably not exceeding 3000 feet, yet the climate was totally changed. At Catania the harvest was entirely over, and the heats were insupportable; here they were moderate, and in many places the corn is as yet green. The road for these twelve miles is the worst I ever travelled; entirely  
over



over old lavas and the mouths of extinguished volcanos, now converted into corn fields, vineyards, and orchards.

The fruit of this region is reckoned by much the finest in Sicily, particularly the figs, of which they have a vast variety. One of these, of a very large size, esteemed superior in flavour to all the rest, they pretend is peculiar to *Ætna* alone.

The lavas which, as I have already said, form this region of the mountain, take their rise from an infinite number of the most beautiful little mountains on earth, which are every where scattered about on the immense declivity of *Ætna*. These are all, without exception, of a regular figure, either that of a cone or a semisphere; and all, but a very few, are covered with the most beautiful trees, and the richest verdure: Every eruption generally forms one of these mountains. As the great crater of *Ætna* itself is raised to such an enormous height above the lower regions of the mountain, it is not possible that the internal fire raging for a vent, even round the base, and no doubt vastly below it, should be carried to the height of twelve or thirteen thousand feet, for probably so high is the summit of *Ætna*. It has therefore generally happened, that after shaking the mountain and its neighbourhood for some time, it at last bursts open its side, and this is called an eruption. At first it only sends forth a thick smoke and showers of ashes, that lay waste the adjacent country: These are soon followed by red hot stones, and rocks of a great size, thrown to an immense height in the air. The fall of these stones, together with the quantities of ashes discharged at the same time, at last form the spherical and conical mountains I have mentioned. Sometimes this process is finished in the course of a few days, sometimes it lasts for months, which was the case in the great eruption 1669. In that case, the mountain formed is of a great size; some of these are not less than

seven or eight miles round, and upwards of 1000 feet in perpendicular height ; others of them are not more than two or three miles round, and 3 or 400 feet high.

After this mountain is formed, the lava generally bursts out from the lower side of it ; and bearing every thing before it, is for the most part terminated by the sea. This is the common process of an eruption ; however, it sometimes happens, though rarely, that the lava bursts at once from the side of the mountain, without all these attending circumstances ; and this is commonly the case with the eruptions of Vesuvius, where the elevation being so much smaller, the melted matter is generally carried into the crater of the mountain, which then exhibits the phenomena I have described ; discharging showers of stones and ashes from the mouth of the volcano, without forming any new mountain, but only adding considerably to the height of the old one ; till at last the lava, rising near the summit of the mountain, bursts the side of the crater, and the eruption is declared. This has literally been the case with two eruptions I have been an attentive witness of in that mountain ; but *Ætna* is upon an infinitely greater scale, and one crater is not enough to give vent to such oceans of fire.

Recupero assures me, he saw in an eruption of that mountain large rocks of fire, discharged to the height of many thousand feet, with a noise infinitely more terrible than that of thunder. He measured from the time of their greatest elevation till they reached the ground, and found they took twenty-one seconds to descend ; which, according to the rule of spaces, being as the squares of the times, amounts, I think, to upwards of 7000 feet. A most astonishing height surely ! and requiring a force of projection vastly beyond what we have any conception of. I measured the height of the explosions of Vesuvius by the same rule, and never observed any of the stones thrown  
from



from it to take more than nine seconds to descend, which amounts to little more than 1200 feet.

Our landlord at Nicolosi gave us an account of the singular fate of the beautiful country near Hybla, at no great distance from this. It was so celebrated for its fertility, and particularly for its honey, that it was called Mel Passi, till it was overwhelmed by the lava of *Ætna*; and having then become totally barren, by a kind of pun its name was changed to Mal Passi. In a second eruption, by a shower of ashes from the mountain, it soon reassumed its ancient beauty and fertility; and for many years was called Bel Passi. Last of all, in the unfortunate æra of 1669, it was again laid under an ocean of fire, and reduced to the most wretched sterility; since which time it is known again by its second appellation of Mal Passi. However, the lava, in its course over this beautiful country, has left several little islands or hillocks, just enough to shew what it formerly was. These make a singular appearance, in all the bloom of the most luxuriant vegetation, surrounded and rendered almost inaccessible by large fields of black and rugged lava. The mountain from whence the first eruption issued, that covered the Mel Passi, is known by the name of Monpelieri; I was struck with its beautiful appearance at a distance, and could not resist the desire I had of examining it minutely, as well as of observing the effects of the two eruptions that overwhelmed this celebrated country.

Monpelieri is rather of a spherical than a conical shape, and does not rise in perpendicular height above 300 feet; but it is so perfectly regular on every side, and so richly overspread with fruits and flowers, that I could not leave so heavenly a spot, without the greatest regret. Its cup or crater is large in proportion to the mountain, and is as exactly hollowed out as the best made bowl. I walked quite round its

outward edge, and think it is somewhat upwards of a mile.

This mountain was formed by the first eruption that destroyed the country of Mel Passi, and is of a very old date. It buried a great number of villages and country houses; and particularly two noble churches, which are more regretted than all the rest, on account of three statues, reckoned at that time the most perfect in the island. They have attempted, but in vain, to recover these statues, as the spot where the churches stood could never be justly ascertained. Indeed it is altogether impossible it should; for these churches were built of lava, which, it is well known is immediately melted, when it comes into contact with a torrent of new erupted matter:—And Massa says, that in some eruptions of *Ætna*, the lava has poured down with such a sudden impetuosity, that, in the course of a few hours, churches, palaces, and villages have been entirely melted down, and the whole run off in fusion, not leaving the least mark of their existence. But if the lava has had any considerable time to cool, this singular effect never happens.

The great eruption of 1669, after shaking the whole country around for no less than four months, and forming a very large mountain of stones and ashes, burst out about a mile above *Monpelieri*, and, descending like a torrent, hit exactly against the middle of that mountain, and (they pretend) has perforated it from side to side; however, this I doubt, as it must have broke the regular form of the mountain, which is not the case. However, it is certain that it pierced it to a very great depth. It then divided into two branches, and surrounding this beautiful mountain, joined again on its south side; and laying waste the whole country betwixt that and *Catania*, scaled the walls of that city, and poured its flaming torrent into the ocean: in its way it is said to have destroyed  
the



the possessions of near 30,000 people, and reduced them to beggary. It formed several hills where there were formerly vallies, and filled up a large deep lake, of which there is not now the least vestige to be seen.

As the events of this eruption are better known than any other, they tell a great many singular stories of it; one of which, however incredible it may appear, is very well ascertained, and is a most undoubted fact. A vineyard, belonging to a convent of je-suits, lay exactly in its way; this vineyard was formed on an antient lava, probably a thin one, with a number of caverns and crevices under it: the liquid lava entering into these caverns, soon filled them up, and by degrees bore up the vineyard; and the je-suits, who every moment expected to see it buried, beheld with the utmost amazement the whole field begin to move off: it was carried on the surface of the lava to a considerable distance, and though the greatest part was destroyed, yet some of it remains to this day.

We went to examine the mouth from whence this dreadful torrent issued, and were surprised to find it only a small hole, of about three or four yards diameter. The mountain from whence it sprung, I think, is very little less than the conical part of Vesuvius.

There is a vast cavern on the opposite side of it, where people go to shoot wild pigeons, which breed there in great abundance. The innermost parts of this cavern are so very dismal and gloomy, that our landlord told us, some people had lost their senses from having advanced too far, imagining that they saw devils and the spirits of the damned; for it is still very generally believed here, that *Ætna* is the mouth of hell.

We found a degree of wildness and ferocity in the inhabitants of this mountain, that I have not observed any where else. It put me in mind of an observa-

tion the Padre della Torre (the historiographer of mount Vesuvius) told me that he had often made in the confines of Naples; that in the places where the air is most strongly impregnated with sulphur, and hot exhalations, the people were always most wicked and vicious. Whatever truth there may be in the observation, the people about Nicolosi, at least, seem to confirm it. The whole village flocked round us, and the women in particular abused us exceedingly; the cause of which, we at last found, was, that F——'s blooming complexion and white skin had made them take him for one of their own sex. The clamour was exceedingly loud, and it was with the utmost difficulty we could appease them. The person whom Recupero had appointed to accompany us, known by the name of the Cyclops, (the man in the island that is best acquainted with mount Ætna) was absolutely ordered by them not to go with us; and if we had not at last obtained their consent by soothing and flattery, the only method with women, he durst not have disobliged them. At first we had been obliged to shut the gate of the court, they were so very noisy and tumultuous; but when our landlord (a priest) for whom we had letters from Catania, assured them that we were christians, and came with no bad intentions, they became more moderate, and we ventured out amongst them.—This confidence soon acquired theirs; and in a short time we became good friends, and had a great deal of conversation.

It was with much difficulty that I could persuade them that we were not come to search for hidden treasures, a great quantity of which, they believe, is to be found in Monpelieri; and when I went to that mountain, they were then fully convinced that this was our intention. Two of them followed me, and kept a close eye on every step that I took; and when I lifted any bit of lava, or pumice, they came running up, thinking it was something very precious; but when they



they observed they were only bits of stone, and that I put them into my pocket, they laughed very heartily, talking to one another in their mountain jargon, which is unintelligible, even to Italians. However, as most of them speak Italian so as to be understood, they asked me what I was going to make of these bits of stone; I told them, that they were of great value in our country, that the people there had a way of making gold of them: At this they both seemed exceedingly surprised, and spoke again in their own tongue. However, I found they did not believe me. One of them told me, if that had been true, I certainly would not have been so ready in telling it: But, said he, if it is so, we will serve you for ever, if you will teach us that art, for then we shall be the richest people on earth. I assured them, that I had not yet learned it myself, and that it was a secret only known to very few. They were likewise greatly surprised to see me pull out of my pocket a magnetical needle and a small electrometer, which I had prepared at Catania, to examine the electrical state of the air; and I was at first afraid they should have taken me for a conjurer (which you know already happened amongst the Appenines) but luckily that idea did not strike them.

On our way back to Nicolosi, we were joined by three or four more, with their wives. I began to be a little afraid of myself, lest they should insist on knowing the secret. However, I took out my bits of lava, and told them they were at their service, if they had any occasion for them. But they refused them, saying, they wished to the Virgin, and St. Agatha, that I could take away the whole of it, as it had ruined the finest country in all Sicily.

One fellow, who assumed an air of superior wisdom and dignity to the rest, made them form a circle round him, and began to interrogate me with great gravity and composure. It was with difficulty

I could keep my countenance; but as I was alone with them, at some distance from the village, I was afraid of offending. — He desired me to answer him, with truth and precision, what were the real motives of our coming so fatiguing and disagreeable a journey? I told him, on my word, that we had no other motive but curiosity to examine mount *Ætna*. On which, laughing to one another with great contempt; — *Un bel ragione questo, non è vero*, said they; (a very pretty reason, truly.) The old fellow then asked me what country we were of. — I told him, we were *Inglese*. — *e dove è loro paese*, said he; whereabouts does their country lie? — I told him it was a great way off, on the other side of the world. *Da vero*, — said the fellow, — *e credono in Christo quelli Inglese?* — I told him (laughing) that they did. — Ah, said he, shaking his head, *mi pare che non credono troppo*. — One of the company then observed, that he remembered several of these *Inglese*, that, at different times, had paid visits to mount *Ætna*, and that they never yet could find out their motive; but that he recollected very well, to have heard many of their old people say, that the *Inglese* had a queen that had burnt in the mountain for many years past; and that they supposed these visits were made from some devotion or respect to her memory. I assured them that the *Inglese* had but too little respect for their queens, even before they were dead, and that they never troubled their heads about them after: however, as all the others confirmed this testimony, I thought it was best to say little against it; but I was extremely curious to know who this queen might be. They alledged that I knew much better than they; but added, that her name was Anna.

I could not conceive what queen Anne had done to bring her there; and was puzzling myself to find it out, when one of them soon cleared up the matter; he told me she was wife to a king that had been a christian,



christian, and that she had made him an heretic, and was in consequence condemned to burn for ever in mount Ætna. In short, I found it was no other than poor Anne Boloyne. So soon as I mentioned the name, *Si signor*, said the fellow, *l'istessa. l'istessa, la connosce meglio che noi*. I asked, if her husband was there too, for that he deserved it much better than she: *sicuro*, said he, and all his heretic subjects too; and if you are of that number, you need not be in such a hurry to get thither, you will be sure of it at last. I thanked him, and went to join our company, not a little amused with the conversation.

We soon after left Nicolosi, and in an hour and an half's travelling, over barren ashes and lava, we arrived on the confines of the Regione Sylvosa, or the Temperate Zone. So soon as we entered these delightful forests, we seemed to have got into another world. The air, which before was sultry and hot, was now cool and refreshing; and every breeze was loaded with a thousand perfumes, the whole ground being covered over with the richest aromatic plants. Many parts of this region are really the most heavenly spots upon earth; and if Ætna resembles hell within, it may with equal justice be said to resemble paradise without.

It is indeed a curious consideration, that this mountain should reunite every beauty and every horror; and, in short, all the most opposite and dissimilar objects in nature. Here you observe a gulph, that formerly threw out torrents of fire and smoke, now covered with the most luxuriant vegetation; and from an object of terror, became one of delight. Here you gather the most delicious fruit, rising from what was but lately a black and barren rock. Here the ground is covered with every flower; and we wander over these beauties, and contemplate this wilderness of sweets, without considering that hell, with all its  
 terrors,

terrors, is immediately under our feet; and that but a few yards separates us from lakes of liquid fire and brimstone.

But our astonishment still increases, on casting our eyes on the higher regions of the mountain. There we behold, in perpetual union, the two elements that are at perpetual war; an immense gulph of fire, for ever existing in the midst of snows that it has not power to melt; and immense fields of snow and ice for ever surrounding this gulph of fire, which they have not power to extinguish.

The woody region of *Ætna* ascends for about eight or nine miles, and forms an exact zone or girdle, of the brightest green, all around the mountain. This night we passed through little more than half of it; arriving some time before sunset at our lodgings, which was no other than a large cave, formed by one of the most antient and venerable lavas. It is called *La Spelonca del Capriole*, or the goats cavern, because frequented by these animals, who take refuge there in bad weather.

Here we were delighted by the contemplation of many great and beautiful objects, the prospect on all sides is immense; and we already seem to be lifted up from the earth, and to have got into a new world.

Our cavern is surrounded by the most stately and majestic oaks; of the dry leaves of which we made very comfortable beds; and with our hatchets, which we had brought on purpose, we cut down great branches, and in a short time had a fire large enough to roast an ox. I observed my thermometer, and found from 71 at Nicolosi, it had now fallen below 60. The barometer stood at 24 : 2. In one end of our cave we still found a great quantity of snow, which seemed to be sent there on purpose for us, as there was no water to be found. With this we filled our tea-kettle, as tea and bread and butter was the only supper we  
had



had provided; and probably the best one to prevent us from being overcome by sleep or fatigue.

Not a great way from this cavern, there are two of the most beautiful mountains of all that immense number that spring from *Ætna*. I mounted one of our best mules, and with a good deal of difficulty arrived at the summit of the highest of these, just a little before sun-set. The prospect of Sicily, with the surrounding sea and all its islands, was wonderfully noble. The whole course of the river *Semestus*, the ruins of *Hybla*, and several other ancient towns; the rich corn fields and vineyards on the lower region of the mountain, and the amazing quantity of beautiful mountains below, made a delightful scene. The hollow craters of these two mountains are each of them considerably larger than that of *Vesuvius*. They are now filled with stately oaks, and covered to a great depth with the richest soil. I observed that this region of *Ætna*, like the former, is composed of lava; but this is now covered so deep with earth, that it is no where to be seen, but in the beds of the torrents. In many of these it is worn down by the water to the depth of fifty or sixty feet, and in one of them still considerably more.—What an idea does not this give of the amazing antiquity of the eruptions of this mountain!

So soon as it was dark we retired to our cave, and took possession of our bed of leaves. Our rest, however, was somewhat disturbed by the noise of a mountain that lay a good way off on our right. It discharged great quantities of smoke, and made several explosions like heavy cannon at a distance; but what is singular, we could observe no appearance of fire.—This mountain was formed by an eruption in 1766, now upwards of four years ago: the fire of which is not yet extinguished, neither is the lava by any means cold. This lava spent its fury on a beautiful forest, which it laid waste to the extent of a good many

many miles. In many places it has run into gullies of a great depth, which it has filled up to the height, we are told, of 200 feet. It is in these places where it retains the greatest heat. On our road to-day we scrambled up this lava, and went a considerable way over its surface, which appeared perfectly cold; but it is certain, that in many places it still emits great volumes of smoke, particularly after rain; and the people say, what I can readily believe, that this will probably be still the case for some years, where the lava is thickest. A solid body of fire of some hundreds of feet thick, and of so great an extent, must certainly retain its heat for many years.—The surface indeed soon becomes black and hard, and incloses the liquid fire within, in a kind of solid box, excluding all impressions from the external air or from the weather. Thus I have seen, many months after eruptions of mount Vesuvius, a thin bed of lava of a few feet, has continued red hot in the center long after the surface was cold; and on thrusting a stick into its crevices, it instantly took fire, although there was no appearance of external heat.

Massa, a Sicilian author of credit, says, he was at Catania eight years after the great eruption in 1669, and that he still found the lava in many places was not cold: But there is an easy method of calculating the time that bodies take to cool:—Sir Isaac Newton, I think, in his account of the comet of 1680, supposes the times to be as the squares of their diameters; and finding that a solid ball of metal of two inches, made red hot, required upwards of an hour to become perfectly cold, made the calculation from that to a body of the same diameter as our earth, and found it would require upwards of twenty thousand years. If this rule is just, you may easily compute the time that the lava will take to become thoroughly cold; and that you may have time to do so, I shall here break off my letter, which I am obliged to write  
in



in bed, in a very aukward and disagreeable posture; the cause of which shall be explained to you in my next. Adieu.

Ever yours.

## L E T T E R X.

Catania, May 29th, at night.

**A**FTE R getting a comfortable nap on our bed of leaves in the Spelonca del Capriole, we awoke about eleven o'clock; and melting down a sufficient quantity of snow, we boiled our tea-kettle, and made a hearty meal, to prepare us for the remaining part of our expedition. We were nine in number; for we had our three servants, the Cyclops (our conductor) and two men to take care of our mules. The Cyclops now began to display his great knowledge of the mountain, and we followed him with implicit confidence. He conducted us over "Antres vast, and Desarts wild," where scarce human foot had ever trod. Sometimes through gloomy forests, which by day-light were delightful; but now, from the universal darkness, the rustling of the trees; the heavy, dull, bellowing of the mountain; the vast expanse of ocean stretched at an immense distance below us; inspired a kind of awful horror. Sometimes we found ourselves ascending great rocks of lava, where if our mules should make but a false step, we might be thrown headlong over the precipice. However, by the assistance of the Cyclops, we overcame all these difficulties; and he managed matters so well, that in the space of two hours we found we had got above the regions of vegetation; and that we had left the forests of Ætna far behind. These appeared now like a dark and gloomy gulph below us, that surrounded the mountain.

The

The prospect before us was of a very different nature; we beheld an expanse of snow and ice that alarmed us exceedingly, and almost staggered our resolution. In the centre of this, but still at a great distance, we observed the high summit of the mountain, rearing its tremendous head, and vomiting out torrents of smoke. It indeed appeared totally inaccessible from the vast extent of the fields of snow and ice that surrounded it. Our diffidence was still increased by the sentiments of the Cyclops. He told us, that it often happened, that the surface of the mountain being hot below, melted the snow in particular spots, and formed pools of water, where it was impossible to foresee our danger; that it likewise happened, that the surface of the water, as well as the snow, was often covered over with black ashes, that rendered it exceedingly treacherous; that however, if we thought proper, he should lead us on with as much caution as possible. Accordingly, after holding a council of war, which you know people generally do when they are very much afraid, we sent our cavalry down to the forest below, and prepared to climb the snows. The Cyclops, after taking a great draught of brandy, desired us to be of good cheer; that we had plenty of time, and might take as many rests as we pleased. That the snow could be little more than seven miles, and that we certainly should be able to accomplish it some time before sun-rise. Accordingly, taking each of us a dram of liquor, which soon removed every objection, we began our march.

The ascent for some time was not rapid; and as the surface of the snow sunk a little, we had tolerable good footing; but as it soon began to grow steeper, we found our labour greatly increased: however we determined to persevere, remembering in the midst of our fatigue, that the emperor Adrian and the philosopher Plato underwent the same; and from the same motive



motive too, to see the rising sun from the top of *Ætna*. After incredible labour and fatigue, but at the same time mixed with a great deal of pleasure, we arrived before dawn at the ruins of an antient structure, called *Il Torre del Filosofo*, supposed to have been built by the philosopher Empedocles, who took up his habitation here the better to study the nature of mount *Ætna*. By others, it is supposed to be the ruins of a temple of Vulcan, whose shop, all the world knows (where he used to make excellent thunderbolts and celestial armour, as well as nets to catch his wife when she went astray) was ever kept in mount *Ætna*. Here we rested ourselves for some time, and made a fresh application to our liquor bottle, which I am persuaded, both Vulcan and Empedocles, had they been here, would have greatly approved of after such a march.

I found the mercury had fallen to 20 : 6. We had now time to pay our adorations in a silent contemplation of the sublime objects of nature. The sky was perfectly clear, and the immense vault of the heavens appeared in awful majesty and splendor. We found that it struck us much more forcibly than below, and at first were at a loss to know the cause; till we observed with astonishment, that the number of the stars seemed to be infinitely increased, and that the light of each of them appeared brighter than usual. The whiteness of the milky way was like a pure flame that shot across the heavens; and with the naked eye we could observe clusters of stars that were totally invisible in the regions below. We did not at first attend to the cause, nor recollect that we had now passed through ten or twelve thousand feet of gross vapour, that blunts and confuses every ray, before it reaches the surface of the earth. We were amazed at the distinctness of vision, and exclaimed together, What a glorious situation for an observatory! Had Empedocles had the eyes of Gallileo, what discoveries must

must he not have made! We regretted that Jupiter was not visible, as I really believe we might have discovered some of his satellites with the naked eye,—or at least with a small glass which I had in my pocket. We observed a light a great way below us on the mountain, which seemed to move amongst the forests, but whether it was an *Ignis Fatuus*, or what it was, I shall not pretend to say. We likewise took notice of several of these meteors called Falling Stars, which still appeared to be equally elevated above us, as when seen from the plain: So that in all probability these bodies move in regions much more remote than the bounds that some philosophers have prescribed to our atmosphere.

After contemplating these objects for some time, we set off, and soon after arrived at the foot of the great crater of the mountain. This is exactly of a conical figure, and rises equally on all sides. It is composed solely of ashes and other burnt materials, discharged from the mouth of the volcano, which is in its center. This conical mountain is of a very great size; its circumference cannot be less than ten miles. Here we took a second rest, as the most violent part of our fatigue still remained. The mercury had fallen to  $20 : 4\frac{1}{2}$ .—We found this mountain excessively steep; and although it had appeared black, it was likewise covered with snow, the surface of which (luckily for us) was spread over with a pretty thick layer of ashes thrown out from the crater. Had it not been for this, we never should have been able to get to the top; as the snow was every where froze hard and solid from the piercing cold of the atmosphere.

In about an hour's climbing, we arrived at a place where there was no snow, and a warm comfortable vapour issued from the mountain, which induced us to make another halt. Here I found the mercury at  $19 : 6\frac{1}{2}$ . The thermometer, to my amazement, was fallen three degrees below the point of congelation; and



and, before we left the summit of *Ætna*, it fell two degrees more, viz. to 27.—From this spot it was only about 300 yards to the highest summit of the mountain, where we arrived in full time, to see the most wonderful and most sublime sight in nature.

But here description must ever fall short; for no imagination has dared to form an idea of so glorious and so magnificent a scene. Neither is there, on the surface of this globe, any one point that unites so many awful and sublime objects.—The immense elevation, from the surface of the earth, drawn as it were to a single point, without any neighbouring mountain for the senses and imagination to rest upon, and recover from their astonishment in their way down to the world! This point or pinnacle, raised on the brink of a bottomless gulph, as old as the world, often discharging rivers of fire, and throwing out burning rocks, with a noise that shakes the whole island! Add to this, the unbounded extent of the prospect, comprehending the greatest diversity and the most beautiful scenery in nature, with the rising sun, advancing in the east, to illuminate the wondrous scene!

The whole atmosphere by degrees kindled up, and shewed dimly and faintly the boundless prospect around.—Both sea and land looked dark and confused, as if only emerging from their original chaos; and light and darkness seemed still undivided, till the morning by degrees advancing, completed the separation.—The stars are extinguished, and the shades disappear. The forests, which but now seemed black and bottomless gulphs, from whence no ray was reflected to shew their form or colours, appear a new creation rising to the sight, catching life and beauty from every increasing beam.—The scene still enlarges, and the horizon seems to widen and expand itself on all sides; till the sun, like the great Creator, appears in the east, and with his plauistic ray com-

pletes the mighty scene.—All appears enchantment ; and it is with difficulty we can believe we are still on earth: The senses, unaccustomed to such objects, are bewildered and confounded ; and it is not till after some time that they are capable of separating and judging of them.—The body of the sun is seen rising from the ocean, immense tracks both of sea and land intervening ; the islands of Lipari, Panari, Alicudi, Strombolo, and Volcano, with their smoking summits, appear under your feet ; and you look down on the whole of Sicily as on a map, and can trace every river through all its windings, from its source to its mouth. The view is absolutely boundless on every side ; nor is there any one object, within the circle of vision, to interrupt it ; so that the sight is every where lost in the immensity ; and I am perfectly convinced that it is only from the imperfection of our organs, that the coasts of Africa, and even of Greece, are not discovered, as they are certainly above the horizon. The circumference of the visible horizon on the top of mount Ætna cannot be less than 2000 miles ; at Malta, which is near 200 miles distant, they perceive all the eruptions from the second region ; and that island is often discovered from about one half the elevation of the mountain ; so that at the whole elevation the horizon must extend to near double that distance, or 400 miles, which makes 800 for the diameter of the circle, and 2400 for the circumference. But this is by much too vast for our senses, not intended to grasp so boundless a scene. I find, indeed, by several of the Sicilian authors, particularly Massa, that the African coast, as well as that of Naples, with many of its islands, have often been discovered from the top of Ætna. Of this, however, we cannot boast, though we can very well believe it. Indeed, if we knew exactly the height of the mountain, it would be easy to calculate the extent of its visible horizon ; and (*vice versa*) if its visible



ble horizon was exactly ascertained, it would be an easy matter to calculate the height of the mountain. — But the most beautiful part of the scene is certainly the mountain itself, the island of Sicily, and the numerous islands lying round it. All these, by a kind of magic in vision, that I am at a loss to account for, seem as if they were brought close round the skirts of *Ætna*; the distances appearing reduced to nothing. — Perhaps this singular effect is produced from the rays of light passing from a rarer medium into a denser, which (from a well known law in optics) to an observer in the rare medium, appears to lift up the objects that are at the bottom of the dense one; as a piece of money placed in a basin appears lifted up, so soon as the basin is filled with water.

The *Regione Deserta*, or the frigid zone of *Ætna*, is the first object that calls your attention. It is marked out by a circle of snow and ice, which extends on all sides to the distance of about eight miles. In the centre of this circle, the great crater of the mountain rears its burning head, and the regions of intense cold and of intense heat seem for ever to be united in the same point. — On the north side of the snowy region, they assure us, there are several small lakes that are never thawed; and that in many places the snow, mixed with the ashes and salts of the mountain, is accumulated to an immense depth: And indeed I suppose the quantity of salts contained in this mountain, is one great reason of the preservation of its snows. — The *Regione Deserta* is immediately succeeded by the *Sylvosa*, or the woody region; which forms a circle or girdle of the most beautiful green, which surrounds the mountain on all sides, and is certainly one of the most delightful spots on earth. This forms a remarkable contrast with the desert region. It is not smooth and even like the greatest part of the latter; but is finely variegated by an infinite number of these beautiful little mountains that

have been formed by the different eruptions of Ætna. All these have now acquired a wonderful degree of fertility, except a very few that are but newly formed, that is, within these five or six hundred years: For it certainly requires some thousands to bring them to their greatest degree of perfection. We looked down into the craters of these, and attempted, but in vain, to number them.

The circumference of this zone or great circle on Ætna is not less than 70 or 80 miles. It is every where succeeded by vineyards, orchards, and corn-fields that compose the *Regione Culta*, or the fertile region. This zone is much broader than the others, and extends on all sides to the foot of the mountain. Its whole circumference, according to Recuperò, is 183 miles. It is likewise covered with a number of little conical and spherical mountains, and exhibits a wonderful variety of forms and colours, and makes a delightful contrast with the other two regions. It is bounded by the sea to the south and south-east, and on all its other sides by the rivers Semetus and Alcantara, which almost run round it. The whole course of these rivers are seen at once, and all their beautiful windings through these fertile valleys, looked upon as the favourite possession of Ceres herself, and the very scene of the rape of her daughter Proserpine.

Cast your eyes a little farther, and you embrace the whole island, and see all its cities, rivers, and mountains, delineated in the great chart of Nature: All the adjacent islands, the whole coast of Italy, as far as your eye can reach; for it is no where bounded, but every where lost in the space. On the sun's first rising, the shadow of the mountain extends across the whole island, and makes a large track visible even in the sea and in the air. By degrees this is shortened, and, in a little time, is confined only to the neighbourhood of Ætna.

We



We now had time to examine a fourth region of *Ætna*, very different, indeed, from the others, and productive of very different sensations; but which has, undoubtedly, given being to all the rest; I mean the region of fire.

The present crater of this immense volcano is a circle of about three miles and a half in circumference. It goes shelving down on each side, and forms a regular hollow like a vast amphitheatre. From many places of this space, issue volumes of sulphureous smoke, which, being much heavier than the circumambient air, instead of rising in it, as smoke generally does, immediately on its getting out of the crater rolls down the side of the mountain like a torrent, till coming to that part of the atmosphere of the same specific gravity with itself, it shoots off horizontally, and forms a large track in the air, according to the direction of the wind; which, happily for us, carried it exactly in the opposite side to that where we were placed. The crater is so hot, that it is very dangerous, if not impossible, to go down into it; besides, the smoke is very incommodious, and, in many places, the surface is so soft, that there have been instances of people sinking down in it, and paying for their temerity with their lives. Near the centre of the crater is the great mouth of the volcano. That tremendous gulph, so celebrated in all ages, looked upon as the terror and scourge both of this and another life, and equally useful to antient poets, or to modern divines, when the Muse, or when the Spirit inspires. We beheld it with awe and with horror, and were not surpris'd that it had been considered as the place of the damned. When we think of the immensity of its depth, the vast cells and caverns whence so many lavas have issued; the force of its internal fire, to raise up these lavas to so vast a height, to support it as it were in the air, and even force it over the very summit of the crater, with all the dreadful accompaniments; the

boiling of the matter, the shaking of the mountain, the explosions of flaming rocks, &c. we must allow, that the most enthusiastic imagination, in the midst of all its terrors, hardly ever formed an idea of a hell more dreadful.

It was with a mixture both of pleasure and pain, that we quitted this awful scene. But the wind had risen to a violent degree, and clouds began to gather round the mountain. In a short time these formed like another heaven below us, and we were in hopes of seeing a thunder-storm under our feet: A scene that is not uncommon in these exalted regions, and which I have already seen on the top of the high Alps: But the clouds were soon dispelled again by the force of the wind, and we were disappointed in our expectations.

I had often been told of the great effect produced by discharging a gun on the top of high mountains. I tried it here, when we were a good deal surprised to find, that instead of increasing the sound, it was almost reduced to nothing. The report was not equal to that of a small pocket-pistol: We compared it to the stroke of a stick on a door; and surely it is consistent with reason, that the thinner the air is, the less its impression must be on the ear; for in a vacuum there can be no noise, or no impression can be made; and the nearer the approach to a vacuum, the impression must always be the smaller. Where these great effects have been produced, it must have been amongst a number of mountains, where the sound is reverberated from one to the other.

When we arrived at the foot of the cone, we observed some rocks truly of a most incredible size, that have been discharged from the crater. The largest that has been observed from Vesuvius, is a round one of about twelve feet diameter. These are of a much greater size; indeed almost in proportion of the mountains to each other.

On



On our arrival at the Torre del Filosofo, we could not help admiring, that the ruins of this structure have remained uncovered for so many ages, almost on the summit of Ætna, when thousands of places at a great distance from it, have been repeatedly buried by its lavas, in a much shorter time. A proof that few eruptions have risen so high in the mountain.

Empedocles was a native of Agrigentum, and is supposed to have died 400 years before the Christian æra. Perhaps his vanity more than his philosophy led him to this elevated situation; nay, it is said to have carried him still much farther:—That he might be looked upon as a god, and that the people might suppose he was taken up to heaven, he is recorded to have thrown himself headlong into the great gulph of mount Ætna, never supposing that his death could be discovered to mankind; but the treacherous mountain threw out his slippers, which were of brass, and announced to the world the fate of the philosopher, who, by his death, as well as life, only wanted to impose upon mankind, and make them believe that he was greater than they.

However, if there is such a thing as philosophy on earth, surely this ought to be the seat of it. The prospect is little inferior to that from the summit; and the mind enjoys a degree of serenity here, that even few philosophers, I believe, could ever boast on that tremendous point.—All Nature lies expanded below your feet, in her gayest and most luxuriant dress, and you still behold united, under one point of view, all the seasons of the year, and all the climates of the earth, with the whole variety of their productions.—The meditations are ever elevated in proportion to the grandeur and sublimity of the objects that surround us; and here, where you have all Nature to arouse your admiration, what mind can remain inactive?

It has likewise been observed, and from experience I can say with truth, that on the tops of the highest

mountains, where the air is so pure and refined, and where there is not that immense weight of gross vapours pressing upon the body, the mind acts with greater freedom, and all the functions both of soul and body are performed in a superior manner. It would appear, that in proportion as we are raised above the habitations of men, all low and vulgar sentiments are left behind; and that the soul, in approaching the æthereal regions, shakes off its earthly affections, and already contracts something of their invariable purity.—Here, where you stand under a serene sky, and behold, with equal serenity, the tempest and storm forming below your feet, the lightning darting from cloud to cloud, and the thunder rolling round the mountain, and threatening with destruction the poor wretches below; the mind considers the little storms and thunder of the human passions as equally below her notice.—Surely the situation alone is enough to inspire philosophy, and Empedocles had good reason for chusing it.

But, alas! how vain are all our reasonings! In the very midst of these meditations, my philosophy was at once overset, and in a moment I found myself relapsed into a poor miserable mortal; was obliged to own, that pain was the greatest of all evils, and would have given the world to have been once more arrived at these humble habitations, which but this moment I looked down upon with such contempt.—In running over the ice, my leg folded under me, and I received so violent a sprain, that in a few minutes it swelled to a great degree, and I found myself totally incapable of putting my foot to the ground. Every muscle and fibre was at that time violently chilled and froze, the thermometer continuing still below the point of congelation. It was this, I suppose, that made the pain so violent; for I lay a considerable time on the ice in the utmost agony: However, in these exalted regions, it was impossible to have a horse, or a carriage



carriage of any kind ; and your poor philosopher was obliged to hop on one leg, with two men supporting him, for several miles over the snow ; and our wags here allege, that he left the greatest part of his philosophy behind him, for the use of Empedocles's heirs and successors. When I at last got on my mule, I was happy beyond measure ; but when I once more found myself on our bed of leaves in the Spelonca del Capriole, I thought I was in Paradise : So true it is, that a diminution of pain is real pleasure. The agony I suffered, had thrown me into a profuse sweat and a fever ; however, in an instant I fell fast asleep, and in an hour and a half awaked in perfect health. We had an excellent dish of tea, the most refreshing and agreeable I ever drank in all my life.

We left the summit of the mountain about six o'clock, and it was eight at night before we reached Catania.—We observed, both with pleasure and pain, the change of the climate as we descended.—From regions of the most rigid winter, we soon arrived at those of the most delightful spring. On first entering the forests, the trees were still bare as in December, not a single leaf to be seen ; but after we had descended a few miles, we found ourselves in the mildest and the softest of climates ; the trees in full verdure, and the fields covered with all the flowers of the summer ; but so soon as we got out of the woods, and entered the torrid zone, we found the heats altogether insupportable, and suffered dreadfully from them before we reached Catania. On the road I saw many mountains which I intended to have visited, but my sprain put it out of my power. One of the most remarkable of these is called the *Monte Pelluse*, the lava of which destroyed the great aqueduct of Catania for eighteen miles. It has here and there left a few arches ; but nothing of any consequence.

Not far from this mountain stands the *Monte Vittoria*, one of the most beautiful of all the numerous family

family of *Ætna*. It is of a pretty large size, and perfectly regular, and seems to be in the gayest dress of all: Many of its trees, which, at a distance, we took to be oranges and citrons, appeared to be in full blow. It was the lava of this mountain that is said to have covered up the port of *Ulysses*, which is now three miles distant from the sea; but I should suppose this mountain to be much older than either *Ulysses* or *Troy*.

On our arrival at *Catania* we went immediately to bed, being exceedingly oppressed by the fatigue of our expedition; but more still by the violent heat of the day: A day, in which, I think, I have enjoyed a greater degree of pleasure, and suffered a greater degree of pain, than in any other day of my life.

As my leg continues very much swelled, I am still confined to my room, and mostly, indeed, to my bed, from whence I have writ you the greatest part of these two monstrous epistles, the enormous length of which I am ashamed of. However, as I have still omitted several articles, that I intended to take notice of, I shall add a sequel to-morrow; and so conclude my account of mount *Ætna*. Had it not been for this abominable sprain, that holds me fast by the foot, you probably should not have got off so easily; but I am obliged to drop all farther thoughts of climbing mountains, though there are many things, I still wanted to examine. Adieu.

Ever yours.

## LETTER XI.

*Catania*, May 30th.

WE took care to regulate two barometers at the foot of the mountain. One of which was left with the *Canonico Recuperò*, and the other we carried along with us. That which we left, *Recuperò* assures



affures us, had no sensible variation during our absence. We both left it and found it at 29 inches 8 lines and a half, English measure. On our arrival at Catania, we found the one we had carried up with us exactly at the same point.

I have likewise a very good quick-silver thermometer, which I borrowed from the Neapolitan philosopher, the Padre della Torre, who furnished us with letters for this place, and would have accompanied us, if he could have obtained leave of the king. It is made by Adams at London, and (as I myself proved) exactly graduated from the two points of freezing and boiling water. It is according to Farenheit's scale. I shall mark the heights in the different regions of *Ætna*, with the rules for estimating the elevation of mountains by the barometer, which, I am sorry to say, are so very ill ascertained; Cassini, Bogue, and the others who have writ on the subject, to the reproach of science, differing so much amongst themselves, that it is with difficulty we can come near the truth.

*Ætna* has been often measured, but I believe never with any degree of accuracy; and it is really a shame to the academy established in this place, called the *Ætnean* academy, whose original intention was to study the nature and properties of this astonishing mountain. It was my full intention to have measured it geometrically; but I am sorry to say, although this is both the feat of an academy and university, there was no such thing as a quadrant to be had. Of all the mountains I have ever seen it would be the easiest to measure, and with the greatest certainty, and perhaps the properest place on the globe to establish an exact rule of mensuration by the barometer. There is a beach of a vast extent, that begins exactly at the foot of the mountain, and runs for a great many miles along the coast. The sea-mark of this beach forms the meridian to the summit of the mountain. Here  
you

you are sure of a perfect level, and may make the base of your triangle of what length you please. But unfortunately this mensuration has never been made, at least with any tolerable degree of precision.

Kircher pretends to have measured it, and to have found it 4000 French toises; which is much more than any of the Andes, or indeed than any mountain upon earth. The Italian mathematicians are still more absurd. Some of them make it eight miles, some six, and some four. Amici, the last, and I believe the most accurate that ever attempted it, brings it to three miles, 264 paces; but even this must be exceedingly erroneous; and probably the height of *Ætna* does not exceed 12000 feet, or little more than two miles. I shall mark the different methods of determining heights by the barometer; and you may chuse which you please. I believe the allowance in all of them, particularly in great elevations, where the air is exceedingly thin and light, is vastly too small. Mikeli, whose mensurations are esteemed more exact, has ever found it so. Cassini allows, I think, ten French toises of elevation for every line of mercury, adding one foot to the first ten, two to the second, three to the third, and so on: But surely the weight of the air diminishes in a much greater proportion.

Boguer takes the difference of the logarithms of the height of the barometer in lines (supposing these logarithms to consist only of five figures); from this difference he takes away a 30th part, and what remains he supposes to be the difference of elevation. I own I do not recollect his reason for this supposition; but this rule seems to be still more erroneous than the other, and has been entirely laid aside. I am told, that accurate experiments have been made at Geneva, to establish the mensuration with the barometer; but I have not as yet been able to procure them. M. de la Hire allows twelve toises four feet for the line of mercury:  
And



## SICILY AND MALTA. 109

And Picart, probably the most exact of all the French academicians, fourteen toises, or about ninety English feet. The palpable difference amongst these philosophers, must ever be a reproach to science.

### Height of Farenheit's Thermometer.

At Catania, May 26, at mid-day	- -	76
Ditto, May 27, at five in the morning	- -	72
At Nicolosi, 12 miles up the mountain, mid-day		73
At the cave, called Spelonca del Capriole, in the second region, where there was still a considerable quantity of snow, at seven at night		61
In the same cave at half an hour past eleven	-	52
At the Torre del Filosofo, in the third region, at three in the morning	- -	34 $\frac{1}{2}$
At the foot of the crater of <i>Ætna</i>	- -	33
About half way up the crater	- -	29
On the summit of <i>Ætna</i> , a little before sun-rise		27

### Height of the barometer in inches and lines.

At the sea-side at Catania	- - -	29 8 $\frac{1}{2}$
At the village of Piedmont, in the first region of <i>Ætna</i>	- - -	27 8
At Nicolosi, in the same region	- -	27 1 $\frac{1}{2}$
At the Castagno de Cento Cavalli, in the second region	- - -	26 5 $\frac{1}{2}$
At the Spelonca del Capriole, in the second region	- - -	24 2
At the Torre del Filosofo, in the third region		20 5
At the foot of the crater	- - -	20 4 $\frac{1}{2}$
Within about 300 yards of the summit	-	19 6 $\frac{1}{2}$
At the summit of <i>Ætna</i> , supposed to be about		19 4

The wind at the summit was so violent that I could not make the observation with perfect exactness; however, I am pretty certain that it is within half a line.

I own I had no conception of this immense height of mount *Ætna*. I had heard it asserted that it was higher

higher than any one of the Alps, but I never gave credit to it:—How great then was my astonishment to find that the mercury fell almost two inches lower than I had ever observed it on the very highest of the accessible Alps; at the same time I am persuaded there are many inaccessible points of the Alps, (particularly the Mont Blanc) that are still much higher than *Ætna*.

I found the magnetical needle greatly agitated near the summit of the mountain; (the Padre della Torre told me, he had made the same observation on Vesuvius) however, it always fixed at the point of north, though it took longer time in fixing than below. But what *Recupero* told me happened to him, was very singular.—Soon after the eruption 1755, he placed his compass on the lava. The needle, he says, to his great astonishment, was agitated with much violence for some considerable time, till at last it entirely lost its magnetical power, standing indiscriminately at every point of the compass; and this it never after recovered, till it was again touched with the loadstone.

The wind, and my unfortunate sprain together, in a great measure prevented our electrical experiments, on which we had built very much; however, I found that round *Nicolosi*, and particularly on the top of *Monpelieri*, the air was in an exceeding favourable state for electrical operations. Here the little pith balls, when insulated, were sensibly affected, and repelled each other upwards of an inch. I expected this electrical state of the air would have increased as we advanced on the mountain; but at the cave where we slept I could observe no such effect. Perhaps it was owing to the exhalations from the trees and vegetables, which are there exceedingly luxuriant; whereas about *Nicolosi*, and round *Monpelieri*, there is hardly any thing but lava and dry hot sand.—Or perhaps it might be owing to the evening being farther advanced, and the dews beginning to fall. However, I have



no doubt, that upon these mountains formed by eruption, where the air is strongly impregnated with sulphureous effluvia, great electrical discoveries might be made. And perhaps, of all the reasons assigned for the wonderful vegetation that is performed on this mountain, there is in fact none that contributes so much towards it, as this constant electrical state of the air: For from a variety of experiments it has been found, that an increase of the electrical matter increases the progress of all vegetation. It probably acts there in the same manner as on the animal body;—the circulation we know is performed quicker, and the juices are driven through the small vessels with more ease and celerity. This has often been proved from the immediate removal of obstructions by electricity;—and probably the rubbing with dry and warm flannel, esteemed so efficacious in these cases, is doing nothing more than exciting a greater degree of electricity in the part; but it has likewise been demonstrated, by the common experiment of making water drop through a small capillary syphon, which the moment it is electrified runs in a full stream.—I have indeed, very little doubt, that the fertility of our seasons depends as much on this quality in the air, as either on its heat or moisture.

Electricity will probably soon be considered as the great vivifying principle of nature, by which she carries on most of her operations.—It is a fifth element, perfectly distinct, and of a superior nature to the other four, which only compose the corporeal parts of matter: But this subtile and active fluid is a kind of soul that pervades and quickens every particle of it.—When an equal quantity of this is diffused through the air, and over the face of the earth, every thing continues calm and quiet; but if by any accident one part of matter has acquired a greater quantity than another, the most dreadful consequences often ensue before the equilibrium

equilibrium can be restored.—Nature seems to fall into convulsions, and many of her works are destroyed:—All the great phænomena are produced; thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and whirlwinds: For, I believe, there is little doubt, that all these often depend on this sole cause. And again, if we look down from the sublime of Nature to its minutæ, we shall still find the same power acting; though perhaps in less eligible characters; for as the knowledge of its operations is as yet in its infancy, they are generally misunderstood, or ascribed to some other cause. However, I have no doubt, that in process of time these will be properly investigated, when mankind will wonder how much they have been in the dark. It will then possibly be found, that what we call sensibility of nerves, and many of those diseases that the faculty have as yet only invented names for, are owing to the body's being possessed of too large or too small a quantity of this subtile and active fluid; that very fluid, perhaps, that is the vehicle of all our feelings, and which they have so long searched for in vain in the nerves: For I have sometimes been led to think, that this sense was nothing else than a slighter kind of electric effect, to which the nerves serve as conductors, and that it is by the rapid circulation of this penetrating and animating fire that our sensations are performed. We all know, that in damp and hazy weather, when it seems to be blunted and absorbed by the humidity, when its activity is lost, and little or none of it can be collected, we ever find our spirits more languid, and our sensibility less acute: but in the Sirocco wind at Naples, when the air seems totally deprived of it, the whole system is unstrung, and the nerves seem to lose both their tension and elasticity, till the north or west wind awakens the activity of this animating power, which soon restores the tone, and enlivens all nature, which seemed to droop and languish during its absence.

It



It is likewise well known, that there have been instances of the human body becoming electric without the mediation of any electric substance, and even emitting sparks of fire with a disagreeable sensation, and an extreme degree of nervous sensibility.

About seven or eight years ago, a lady in Switzerland was affected in this manner, but I was not able to learn all the particulars of her case; however several Swiss gentlemen have confirmed to me the truth of the story.—She was uncommonly susceptible of every change of weather, and had her electrical feelings strongest in a clear day, or during the passage of thunder-clouds, when the air is known to be replete with that fluid. Her disease, like all others which the doctors can make nothing of, was decided to be a nervous one; for the real signification of these words I take to be only, that the physician does not understand what it is.

Two gentlemen of Geneva had a short experience of the same sort of complaint, though still in a much superior degree.—Professor Saussure and young Mr. Jalabert, when travelling over one of the high Alps, were caught amongst thunder-clouds; and to their utter astonishment, found their bodies so full of electrical fire, that spontaneous flashes darted from their fingers with a crackling noise, and the same kind of sensation, as when strongly electrified by art.—This was communicated by Mr. Jalabert to the Academy of Sciences at Paris, I think in the year 1763; and you will find it recorded in their memoirs.

It seems pretty evident, I think, that these feelings were owing to the bodies being possessed of too great a share of electric fire. This is a very uncommon case; but I do not think it at all improbable, that many of our invalids, particularly the hypochondriac people, and those we call *Malades Imaginaires*, owe their disagreeable feelings to the opposite cause, or the bodies being possessed of too small a quantity

of this fire; for we find that a diminution of it in the air seldom fails to increase these feelings, and *vice versa*.

Perhaps it might be of service to these people to wear some electric substance next their skin, to defend the nerves and fibres from the damp, or non-electric air.—I would propose a waistcoat of the finest flannel, which should be kept perfectly clean and dry; for the effluvia of the body, in case of any violent perspiration, will soon destroy its electric quality: This should be immediately covered by another of the same size of silk, but without being sewed together. The animal heat, and the friction that exercise must occasion betwixt these two substances, produce a powerful electricity; and would form a kind of electric atmosphere around the body, that might possibly be one of the best preservatives against the effect of damps.

As for our Swiss lady, I have little doubt that her complaints were owing in great part, perhaps entirely, to her dress; and that a very small alteration, almost in any part of it, would effectually have cured her. A lady who has her head surrounded with a wire cap, and her hair stuck full of metal pins, and who at the same time stands upon dry silk, is to all intents and purposes an electrical conductor insulated, and prepared for collecting the fire from the atmosphere: And it is not at all surprizing, that during thunder-storms, or when the air is extremely replete with electrical matter, she should emit sparks, and exhibit other appearances of electricity.—I imagine a very trifling change of dress, which from the constant versatility of their modes may some day take place, would render this lady's disease altogether epidemical amongst the sex.—Only let the soles of their shoes be made an electric substance, and let the wires of their caps, and pins of their hair, be somewhat lengthened



ened and pointed outwards; and I think there is little doubt, that they will often find themselves in an electrified state:—But, indeed, if they only wear silk, or even worsted stockings, it may sometimes prove sufficient; for I have often insulated electrometers as perfectly by placing them on a piece of dry silk or flannel, as on glass.

How little do our ladies imagine, when they surround their heads with wire, the most powerful of all conductors, and at the same time wear stockings, shoes, and gowns of silk, one of the most powerful repellents, that they prepare their bodies in the same manner, and according to the same principles as electricians prepare their conductors for attracting the fire of lightning. If they cannot be brought to relinquish their wire caps and their pins, might they not fall upon some such preservative as those which of late years have been applied to objects of much less consequence.

Suppose that every lady should provide herself with a small chain or wire, to be hooked on at pleasure during thunder-storms. This should pass from her cap over the thickest part of her hair, which will prevent the fire from being communicated to her head; and so down to the ground.—It is plain that this will act in the same manner as the conductors on the tops of steeples, which from the metal spires that are commonly placed there, analagous to the pins and wires, were so liable to accidents. You may laugh at all this; but I assure you I never was more serious in my life. A very amiable lady of my acquaintance, Mrs. Douglas, of Kelso, had almost lost her life by one of those caps mounted on wire. She was standing at an open window during a thunder storm: The lightning was attracted by the wire, and the cap was burnt to ashes; happily her hair was in its natural state, without powder, pomatum, or pins; and prevented

the fire from being conducted to her head, for as she felt no kind of shock, it is probable that it went off from the wires of the cap to the wall, close to which she then stood. If it had found any conductor to carry it to her head or body, in all probability she must have been killed.—A good strong head of hair, if it is kept perfectly clean and dry, is probably one of the best preservatives against the fire of lightning. But so soon as it is stuffed full of powder and pomatum, and bound together with pins, its repellent force is lost, and it becomes a conductor \*.—But I beg pardon for these surmises : I throw them in your way only for you to improve upon at your leisure : For we have it ever in our power to be making experiments in electricity. And although this fluid is the most subtile and active of any that we know, we can command it on all occasions ; and I am now so accustomed to its operations, that I seldom comb my hair, or pull off a stocking, without observing them

\* Since the writing of these letters, the author has made some experiments on the electricity of hair, which tend still to convince him the more of what he has advanced. A lady had told him, that on combing her hair in frosty weather, in the dark, she had sometimes observed sparks of fire to issue from it. This made him think of attempting to collect the electrical fire from hair alone, without the assistance of any other electrical apparatus. To this end, he desired a young lady to stand on a cake of bees-wax, and to comb her sister's hair, who was sitting on a chair before her.—Soon after she began to comb, the young lady on the wax was greatly astonished to find her whole body electrified ; darting out sparks of fire against every object that approached her. The hair was extremely electrical, and effected an electrometer at a very great distance. He charged a metal conductor from it with great ease ; and in the space of a few minutes collected as much fire immediately from the hair, as to kindle common spirits ; and by means of a small phial gave many smart shocks to all the company. A full account of these experiments was lately read before the Royal Society. They were made during the time of a very hard frost, and on a strong head of hair, where no powder or pomatum had been used for many months.

under



under some form or other. How surprising is it then, that mankind should have lived and breathed in it for so many thousand years, without almost ever supposing that it existed ! But to return to our mountain.

Recupero told me he had observed the same phænomenon here that is common in the eruptions of mount Vesuvius, viz. red or blueish lightning darting from the smoke, without being followed by the noise of thunder. The reason possibly is, that the whole crater and smoke is at that time so highly electrical, that like a cylinder or globe, heated by friction, it throws off spontaneous flashes into the air, without being brought into the attraction of any conductor, or body less electric than itself ; (indeed the spontaneous discharges from a good electrical globe, often bear a perfect resemblance to this kind of lightning :) however, if a non-electric cloud was to pass near the crater at that time, the crash of thunder would probably be very violent, which indeed is often the case when the air is full of wet clouds in the time of an eruption ; but when this does not happen, the equilibrium is probably restored by degrees, and without any shock, from the surplus of electrical matter being gradually communicated to the earth and sea all around the mountain ; the immense lavas that have run from it, serving as conductors.

So highly electric is the vapour of volcanos, that it has been observed in some eruptions both of *Ætna* and *Vesuvius*, that the whole track of smoke, which sometimes extended for upwards of 100 miles, produced the most dreadful effects ; killing shepherds and flocks on the mountains ; blasting trees, and setting fire to houses, wherever it met with them on an elevated situation. Now probably the flying of a kite, with a wire round its string, would soon have disarmed this formidable cloud. These effects, however, only happen when the air is dry and little agitated,

but when it is full of moist vapour, the great rarefaction from the heat of the lava generally brings it down in violent torrents of rain, which soon conveys the electrical matter from the clouds to the earth, and restores the equilibrium.

As Recupero, who is a facetious and an agreeable companion, was kind enough to sit a good deal with me during my confinement, I have gathered many remarks from his conversation, that may perhaps be worthy of your attention.

The variety of waters about *Ætna*, he tells me, is altogether astonishing. I have already mentioned the *Fiume Freddo*, or the river of *Acis*: Recupero confirms what I had been told of it. There is a lake on the north of the mountain, of about three miles in circumference, which receives several considerable rivers; yet, although there is no apparent outlet, it never overflows its banks. I suggested that there might probably be a subterraneous communication betwixt this and the *Fiume Freddo*. He said there was no resemblance in the quality of their waters; however, I think it is probable, that in a course of so many miles, through the caverns of *Ætna*, full of salts and of minerals, it may both acquire its cold and its vitriolic qualities.

There is another lake on the top of a mountain to the west of *Ætna*, the bottom of which could never be found. It is observed never either to rise or fall, but always preserves the same level. It is undoubtedly the crater of that mountain (which is all of burnt matter) converted into a lake. The river which supplies the baths of Catania is of a very different nature: It never continues the same, but is perpetually changing. Its current is for the most part confined under ground by the lavas; but sometimes it bursts out with such violence that the city has suffered greatly from it; and what is still more unfortunate, these eruptions are generally followed by some epidemical distemper.



distemper. It has now been constantly diminishing for these two years past, and is at present almost reduced to nothing. They are in perpetual dread of its breaking out, and laying waste their fields, as it has so often done before. What is exceedingly singular, it generally bursts out after a long tract of the driest and warmest weather. The Ætnean Academy have never been able to account for this singular phenomenon. I think it is most probable that it arises from the melting of the snows on Ætna, but I shall not pretend to say how. These, perhaps, over-filling the caverns that usually receive their water, the surplus is carried off into this river.

The river of Alcantara certainly takes its rise from the melting of these snows. Its waters, I observed, are exactly of the same whitish colour as all the rivers are, that run from the Glaciers amongst the Alps. There are several periodical springs on Ætna, that flow only during the day, and stop during the night. These too, are naturally and easily accounted for from the melting of the snows; for they melt only during the day, being hard froze every night, even in the hottest season. There are likewise a variety of poisonous springs, some of so deadly a quality, that birds and beasts have often been found lying dead on their banks, from having drank of their water. But (what is perhaps still more singular) Recupero told me, that about twenty years ago, there opened a rent in the mountain, that for a considerable time sent forth so strong a vapour, that, like the lake Avernus, birds were absolutely suffocated in flying over it.

There are many caverns where the air is so excessively cold, that it is impossible to support it for any time. These the peasants make use of as reservoirs for the snow; and indeed they make the finest ice-houses in the world, preserving it hard froze during the hottest summers. It would be endless to give an account of all the caverns, and other singular phenomena about Ætna. Kircher speaks of one which

he saw, capable, he says, of containing 30,000 men. Here, he adds, numbers of people have been lost from their temerity in going too far. One of these caverns still retains the name of Proserpine, from its being supposed by the ancients, that it was by this entry that Pluto conveyed her into his dominions; on which occasion Ovid describes Ceres as searching for her daughter, with two trees which she had plucked from the mountain, by way of torches. These trees he calls Teda, which is still the name of a tree, I have never seen any where but on mount Ætna; it produces great quantities of a kind of rosin, and was the very properest tree Ceres could have pitched upon for her purpose. This rosin is called *Catalana*, and is esteemed a cure for sores.

I have mentioned the vast variety of flowers, trees, &c. on mount Ætna. I have found a long list of them in Massa; but as I am not acquainted with their Sicilian names, I can make little out of it. I have engaged a person here to procure me a collection of their seeds in the season. I find of the number, the cinnamon, sassaparilla, saffra, rhubarb, and many others that I thought had only been found in the Indies. The palma Christi too, that plant so much celebrated of late, from the seed of which the castor oil is made, grows both here, and in many other places of Sicily, in the greatest abundance. Our botanists have denominated it *Resinus Americanus*, supposing it only to be produced in that part of the world. A Bath physician, I remember, has lately wrote a treatise on this plant, and the virtues of the oil extracted from its seed, which he makes to be a perfect Catholicon. You may believe we shall not leave Sicily without providing ourselves with a quantity of this precious seed.

Mount Ætna, I find, is as much celebrated by the ancients as the moderns, for the variety of its odoriferous productions. Plutarch says, their smell was  
so



so strong, that on many places of the mountain it was impossible to hunt. I shall transcribe the passage as it is before me, in an old translation I have borrowed :

“ Circum Ætnam in Sicilia neminem ferunt cum  
 “ canibus venatum iri ; quia enim multos perpetuo  
 “ illic ut in viridario prata, collesque flores mittunt  
 “ a fragrantia, quæ eam oram occupat, obfuscare  
 “ ferarum anhelationes, &c.” Aristotle has likewise  
 a passage to the very same purpose ; but this may  
 suffice.

There were formerly a variety of wild beasts in the woody regions of Ætna ; but notwithstanding this advantage they had over the dogs and hunters, the number of these is now greatly reduced.—They have still wild boars, roebucks, and a kind of wild goat ; but the race of stags, which was much celebrated, as well as that of bears, is thought to be extinct. Several places of the mountain are still named from these animals.

The horses and cattle of mount Ætna were esteemed the best in Sicily. The cattle are still of a very large size, and have horns of so prodigious a length, that they are preserved as curiosities in some museums. The horses, I am afraid, have degenerated.

There are said to be quantities of porcupines and land tortoises on some parts of Ætna ; but we had not the good fortune to meet with any of them ; neither did we see any eagles or vultures, which are likewise said to be inhabitants of this mountain.

The accounts given of mount Ætna by the old Sicilian authors (several of whom I have borrowed from *Recupero*) are very various. Some of them describe the hollow of the crater as being seven or eight miles in circumference ; some make it five, and others make it only three : And probably all of them are right ; for I find, by all their accounts, that generally, once in about one hundred years, the whole  
 crater

crater has fallen down into the bowels of the mountain : That in process of time a new crater is seen peeping out of the gulph ; which, perpetually increasing by the matter thrown up, is by degrees raised again to its antient height, till at last becoming too heavy for the hollow foundations that support it, it again gives way, and at once sinks down into the mountain. This happened about one hundred years ago, in the year 1669, as recorded by Borelli, whose account of it I have before me. He says,

“ Universum cacumen, quod ad instar speculæ,  
 “ feu turris, ad ingentem altitudinem elevabatur,  
 “ quod una cum vasta planitie arenosa depressa,  
 “ atque absorpta est in profundam voraginem,”  
 &c. The same likewise happened in the year 1536, as recorded by Fazzello and Filoteo, and in the years 1444, 1329, and 1157. Of all these I have read an account ; but probably, betwixt the two last mentioned, there has been another that is not recorded, as the intervals betwixt all the rest are pretty nearly equal.

Some of them give a dreadful account of it. Folcando, one of their historians, says it shook the whole island, and resounded through all its shores. And their celebrated poet Errico says, on the same occasion :

“ *S'ode il suo gran mugito*  
 “ *Per mille piagge e lidi.*”

“ The bellowing dire a thousand lands resound,  
 “ Whose trembling shores return the dreadful  
 “ found.”

In all probability this singular event will very soon happen, as the circumference of the crater is nowhere recorded to have been reduced to less than  
 three



three miles. And Recupero says, it is at present only three miles and a half; besides, one hundred years, the common period, has now elapsed since its last fall.

There are many stories of people perishing by their temerity, in being too curious spectators of the eruptions of this mountain; but there are still many more, of those that have been miraculously saved by the interposition of some saint, or the virgin, who are supposed to be in a perpetual state of warfare with the devils in mount Ætna. That part of the island where Ætna stands, has ever been named *il Val Demoni*, from the frequent apparitions of these devils. This constitutes one third of the island; the other two are named the *Val di Nota*, and the *Val di Mazzara*.

There is one story that is still celebrated at Catania, though it is a very antient one. It is taken notice of by Seneca, Aristotle, Strabo, and other antient authors. In the time of one of the eruptions that destroyed Catania, when the fire was pouring down upon the city, and every one was carrying off his most valuable effects, two rich brothers, named *Anfinomus* and *Anapias*, neglecting all their wealth, escaped from the conflagration with their aged parents on their backs. These authors add, that the fire, respecting such filial piety, spared them, whilst many others that took the same road were consumed.

This story has been wonderfully extolled, and proves, I think, that actions of this kind were by no means common in those days.—Now, pray don't you think, in the world at present, bad as it is supposed to be, there are very few sons that would not have acted in the same manner? And sure I am, the rest of mankind would not have made such a fuss about it. Humanity and natural affection, I believe, in those ages we are inclined to extol so much, were  
not

not by many degrees so powerful as they are at present.—Even the pious Æneas himself, the most celebrated of all their heroes, was at the best but a savage, notwithstanding all that Virgil says to persuade us to the contrary; for you find him sacrificing his weak and captive enemies, at the same time that he is canting and preaching up piety.

These two brothers were so celebrated for this action, that there was a dispute betwixt Syracuse and Catania, which of these cities had given them birth; and temples were erected in both these places, dedicated to Filial Piety, in memory of the event.

In the accounts of the more recent destructions of Catania, there occurs no instance of this sort.—We find them only lamenting the loss of priests and nuns, and very much out of humour at their saints, for allowing the devils to get the better of them. I have been a good deal entertained with some of these authors.—Selvaggio, one of their poets, speaking of the terrible earthquake in the year 1169, that destroyed Catania, and buried multitudes of people in the ruins, describes it in the following manner, which may serve as a specimen of the poetry of that time:

“ Cataniam doleo, dolor est miserabile dictu :  
 Clara potens antiqua fuit ; plebe, milite, clero,  
 Divitiis, auro, specie, virtute, triumphis.  
 Heu terræ motu ruit illa potentia rerum !  
 Morte ruit juvenis, moritur, vir, sponsa, maritus,  
 Unde superbit homo ? Deus unâ diruit hora  
 Turres, ornatus, vestes, cunctosque paratus.  
 In tanto gemitu periit pars maxima gentis,  
 Proh dolor ! et monachi quadraginta quatuor et  
 plus :  
 Et periit pastor patriæ, pater ipse Johannes  
 Pontificalis honor, lux regni sic periere.”

But another fellow, Gustanavilla, one of their historians, gives a very different account of this affair ;  
 as



as it is likewise somewhat curious in its way, I shall copy it for your amusement.

“ In omnem terram, et in fines orbis terræ jam  
 “ exiit plaga illa, qua nuper in Sicilia percussi sunt  
 “ Catanenses in vigilia B. Agathæ; cum episcopus  
 “ ille damnatissimus, qui, sicut scitis, sibi sumpsit  
 “ honorem, non vocatus a Domino, tanquam Aaron,  
 “ et qui ad sedem illam, non electione canonica, sed  
 “ Giezticâ venalitate intravit; cum inquam abomi-  
 “ nationis offerret incensum, intonuit de cœlo Do-  
 “ minus, et ecce terræ motus factus est magnus; an-  
 “ gelus enim Domini percutiens episcopum in fu-  
 “ rore Domini cum populo, et universa civitate sub-  
 “ vertit.”

He adds, that if St. Agatha's veil had not been produced, the angel of the Lord was in such a fury, that he would not have left one soul alive.

There is a curious painting of the great eruption 1669, in the cathedral of this place; it is but indifferently painted, but gives a dreadful idea of that event. Borelli, who was upon the spot, describes it. —He says, on the 11th of March, some time before the lava burst out, after violent earthquakes, and dreadful subterraneous bellowing, a rent was opened in the mountain twelve miles long; in some places of which, when they threw down stones, they could not hear them strike the bottom. He says, that burning rocks, sixty palms in length, were thrown to the distance of a mile; and that the giants, supposed to be buried under mount Ætna, seemed to have renewed their war against heaven; that stones of a lesser size were carried upwards of three miles; and that the thunder and lightning from the smoke, was scarce less terrible than the noise of the mountain. He adds, that after the most violent struggles and shaking of the whole island, when the lava at last burst through,

through, it sprung up into the air, to the height of sixty palms.—In short, he describes that event, as well as the universal terror and consternation it occasioned, in terms full of horror.—For many weeks the sun did not appear, and the day seemed to be changed into night.—Soon after the lava got vent, which was not till four months from the time that the mountain began to throw, all these dreadful symptoms abated, and it was soon after perfectly quiet.

He says, this deluge of fire, after destroying the finest country in Sicily, and sweeping away churches, villages, and convents before it, burst over the lofty walls of Catania, and covered up five of its bastions with the intervening curtains. From thence pouring down on the city, it laid waste every object it met with, overwhelming and burying all in one promiscuous ruin.

What he regrets most, was some precious remains of antiquity; the names, the situation, and even the memory of whose existence, is now lost in the place. He mentions an amphitheatre, which he calls *Colliseo*, the *Circus Maximus*, the *Naumackia*, and several temples.

An account of this great eruption was sent to Charles II. by Lord Winchelsea, who was then on his return from an embassy at Constantinople, and stopped at Catania, on purpose to see so remarkable a phenomenon; but his lordship has not been at that pains to examine it we could have wished. His curiosity was satisfied in one day; and he seems to have been contented only to look at the lava at a great distance, but did not think of examining its source, or ascending the mountain, although at that time all the most formidable symptoms of the eruption were already over.

I should not finish this account of mount *Ætna*, without saying something of the various fables and allegories to which it has given rise; but it would probably



probably lead me into too vast a field, and give this more the air of a dissertation than a letter or a journal. These you will easily recollect.—They have afforded ample employment for the muse, in all ages and in all languages; and indeed the philosopher and natural historian have found, in the real properties of this mountain, as ample a fund of speculation as the poets have done in the fictitious.—It is so often mentioned by the antient writers, that it has been said of *Ætna*, as well as of Greece:

“ Nullum est sine nomine saxum.”

Indeed, I am afraid this saying was much more applicable to it formerly than it is at present; for we even found several large mountains that had no name; and it does not at all appear that the number of philosophers in Sicily have by any means increased in the later ages. Their ambition is now changed; and if they can get a saint to keep the devils of *Ætna* in order, they trouble themselves very little about the cause of its operations; and do not value their island half so much for having given birth to Archimedes or Empedocles, as St. Agatha and St. Rosalia.

The antients, as well as the moderns, seem ever to have considered *Ætna* as one of the highest mountains on the globe. There are many passages in their authors that shew this; though, perhaps, none more strongly than their making Deucalion and Pyrrha take refuge on the top of it, to save themselves from the universal deluge\*.

I shall now conclude this long account of mount *Ætna*, with Virgil's celebrated description of it in the third *Æneid*, which has been so much admired. You may compare it with the following description

\* Cataclysmus, quod nos diluvium dicimus, cum factus est, omne genus humanum interiiit præter Deucalionem et Pyrrham, qui in montem *Ætnam* qui altissimus in Sicilia esse dicitur fugerunt, &c.

HIGINUS.

of the famous poet Raitano, held, I assure you, in full as high estimation by the Sicilians.

“ Nel mezzo verso l'ethere avvicina  
 Ætna la fronte sua cinta di orrori,  
 E con ispavantevole rovina  
 Rimbomba, e con orribili fragori.  
 Sovente negri nubi al ciel destina  
 Fumanti di atro turbine, e di ardori,  
 Ergi globbi di fiamma, e su lambisce  
 Le stelle omai con infuocate striscie ;  
 Scogli, e divelte viscere di monte  
 Erruttando tal volta avido estolle ;  
 E con gemiti vomita, e con onte  
 Liquifatti macigni, e in fondo bolle.”

So sings the Sicilian muse ;—you will not hesitate to give the preference to the Latin one, although the former is evidently stole from her.

“ ———Horrificis juxta tonat Ætna ruinis,  
 Interdumque atram prorumpit ad æthera nubem,  
 Turbine fumantem piceo et candente favilla,  
 Attollitque globos flammæ, et sidera lambit.  
 Interdumque scopulos, avolasque viscera montis  
 Erigit eructans, liquefactaque saxa sub auras  
 Cum gemitu glomerat, fundoque exæstuat imo.”

But both these have been greatly outdone by the wonderful imagination of our great countryman Sir Richard Blackmore ; who accounts at once for the whole phænomena of Ætna, by the plain and simple idea of giving the mountain a fit of the cholic : A thought that had escaped all the poets and philosophers of antiquity, and seems for ever to have been reserved for the profound genius of this great master and father of the Bathos.—I have forgot the passage, but you will find it, I think, in prince Arthur.

The philosophical poet, Lucretius, has likewise mentioned the eruption of mount Ætna ; but Pindar  
 is



is the oldest poet we know of, that has taken any notice of them. His description is, I think, by much the most satisfactory of all, and conveys a clearer idea both of the mountain itself, and an eruption of the mountain, than either the Latin or Sicilian poet, though it is not near so much laboured, nor worked up with all that variety of circumstances, that they have found means to introduce. Its greatest fault is, that Pindar had still kept in view that absurd and ridiculous idea of the antients, that Jupiter had buried the giants below mount Ætna, and that their struggling to get loose, was the cause of its eruptions: But even this he touches but slightly, as if he was ashamed to give such a reason. The passage is translated into English by Mr. West.

“ Now under smoking Cuma’s sulph’rous coast,  
And vast Sicilia, lies his tortur’d breast.  
By snowy Ætna, nurse of endless frost,  
The mighty prop of heaven for ever prest,  
Forth from whose flaming caverns issuing rise  
Tremendous fountains of pure liquid fire,  
Which veil in ruddy mists the noon-day skies,  
While wrapt in smoke the edying flames aspire ;  
Or gleaming thro’ the night with hideous roar,  
Far o’er the red’ning main huge rocky fragments  
pour.”

This passage of Pindar shews, to a demonstration, what has been much disputed, that Ætna was, in these early ages, of as great an elevation as it is at present. It has been alledged, that volcanos always increase in height till they are extinguished, when they are supposed to moulder down, and by degrees sink into the caverns that are below them, like the astruni, and the solfaterra at Naples:—But this puts it out of dispute: We find that Ætna was then, as it is now, covered with eternal snows, and was supposed, like

Atlas, to be one of the great props of heaven. But what pleases me the most in this description is, that it proves, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that in these very remote eruptions, it was common for the lavas of *Ætna* to run a great way out to sea.—The conclusion, I think, is fully as just, and perhaps not less sublime, than the “*avolasque viscera montis erigit eructans*” of Virgil, which, I must own, I think rather comes too near Sir Richard’s fit of the cholic.

Thucydides speaks of three eruptions of this mountain; but is not so particular as we could have wished. He does not mention the date of the first; but says, it was the earliest after the arrival of the Greeks in Sicily. The second happened about the time of the 77th Olympiad, and the last in that of the 88th, which was nearly about the period when Pindar wrote; so that we cannot doubt that his description is taken from the accounts he had heard of some of these eruptions, the circumstances of which, no doubt, at that time, had afforded matter of conversation all over Greece.

I think we may now try to take leave of *Ætna*, though I am afraid, during the remainder of our expedition, we shall meet with nothing at all worthy to succeed to it.—We shall sail from this to-morrow morning; and expect to sleep at Syracuse, as it is only about fifty miles distant. I shall write to you again from the ruins of that celebrated city. Farewell.

Ever yours.

## LETTER XII.

Syracuse, June 1st.

ON the 31st of May we embarked on board a *fellucca*, and set sail for the mighty Syracuse.—The wind was favourable, and for some time we went  
at



at a prodigious rate. The view of mount *Ætna*, for the whole of this little voyage, is wonderfully fine, and the bold black coast formed, for near thirty miles, of the lava of that immense volcano, gives the most awful idea of its eruptions.—There is no part of this coast nearer than thirty miles to its summit; and yet there has hardly been any great eruption, where the lava has not reached the sea, and driven back its waters to a great distance, leaving high rocks and promontories, that for ever set its waves at defiance, and prescribe their utmost limits. What a tremendous scene the meeting betwixt these adverse elements must have formed!

We may easily conceive the vast variety of changes this coast has undergone in the space of some thousands of years, as every considerable eruption must have made a material difference.—Virgil is wonderfully minute and exact in his geography of Sicily; and this is the only part of the island that seems to be materially altered since his time. He says there was a large fine port at the foot of *Ætna*, where ships were secure from every wind;

“ *Portus ab accessu ventorum immotus et ingens;*”

of which, at present there is not the least vestige or remains. It is probably the same that was denominated by the Sicilians the port of Ulysses, and is often mentioned by their writers.—The place of its existence is still shewn betwixt three and four miles up the country, amongst the lavas of *Ætna*. However, I can see no sort of reason why they have called this the port of Ulysses: For surely Homer does not bring his hero near the precincts of mount *Ætna*. Indeed I think it is altogether evident, that that volcano did not burn during the age of Homer, nor for some ages preceding it, otherwise it is not possible, that he would have said so much of Sicily, without

taking any notice of great and capital an object: The one in the world, that the daring and sublime imagination of Homer would have been the most eager to grasp at.—It is evident, from his account, that Ulysses landed at the west end of Sicily, opposite to the island of Lachaea, now Favignana, almost two hundred miles distant from this port.

Virgil, with more judgment, lands his hero at the foot of *Ætna*, which gives him an opportunity of introducing some of the finest description in the *Æneid*. However, it is somewhat singular, that here he makes *Æneas* find one of Ulysses's companions, who had escaped the rage of Polyphemus, and had lived for several months in the woods and caverns of this mountain.—Virgil must have been very sensible of this impropriety, as he well knew, that Homer had landed Ulysses, and placed the cave of Polyphemus at the most distant point of the island. But he could not prevail on himself to pass mount *Ætna*.—He was so thoroughly convinced, that this was the most proper landing place for an epic hero, as well as the most proper habitation for the Cyclops, that, by a bold poetical licence, he has fairly taken it for granted, that Homer really made it so.—Indeed, in this passage, the pleasure he affords to the imagination of his reader, makes an ample amends for his having imposed on his judgment. But to return to our voyage.

The view of the mountain from the sea is much more complete and satisfactory than any where on the island. The eye takes in a greater portion of the circle, and you observe, with more distinctness, how it rises equally on all sides, from its immense base, overspread with the beautiful little mountains I have mentioned; and at once can trace the progress of vegetation from its utmost luxuriance, to where it is checked by the two extremes of heat and of cold.—

The



The different regions of the mountain are distinctly marked out, by their different colours, and different productions; exposing at once to the ravished eye every climate, and every season, with all their variety;

“ Where blossoms, fruits, and flowers together rise,  
 “ And the whole year in gay confusion lies.”

The first region exhibits every object that characterizes summer and autumn; the second, those of the most delightful spring; the third, an eternal and unrelenting winter; and the fourth, to complete the contrast, the regions of unextinguishable fire.

The circumference of the great base of *Ætna*, Recupero told me, he had been at a good deal of pains to have exactly ascertained; as it had generally been computed only at a hundred miles, or little more, although the radii of that circle had ever been esteemed at thirty of these miles; an absurdity in computation that had put him upon making this enquiry; the result of which was, that taking the supposed distances of one place from another, all the way round, the sum of the whole amounted to one hundred and eighty-three miles: an immense circle, surely, and which is still increased by every considerable eruption. The whole of this circle is formed of lava and burnt matter; and I have observed, that near the very outermost skirts of it, there have been many little eruptions that have pierced through some of the thickest lavas of *Ætna*. These small eruptions, at so vast a distance from the great furnace of the mountain, are probably occasioned by the intense heat of the lava, (which continues for many years) rarifying the air in the caverns it has run over, which bursting forth from its prison, the lava sinks down, and kindling the sulphur and nitre with which these caverns are filled, exhibits in miniature the phenomena of a great eruption.

There is a large sandy beach, that extends from the mouth of the river Simetus, a great way to the south of Catania, and was certainly continued the whole way to the foot of the mountain of Taurominum, (where there is still some remains of the east end of it) till it was broke in upon, many thousand years ago, by the lavas of Ætna; which, from a low sandy shore, have now converted it into a high, bold, black iron coast. What is a strong proof of this;—in many places where they have sunk deep wells, after piercing through the lava, they have at last come to beds of shells and sea sand.

There is nothing else that is very interesting in the voyage from Catania to Syracuse. If you will read the conclusion of the third book of the Æneid, you will find a much better description of it than any I can give you. The coast lies low, and except Ætna, there are no very striking points of view.

We passed the mouths of several rivers: The first and most considerable is the Giarretta or river of St. Paul, formerly the Simetus, and under that name celebrated by the poets. The nymph Thalia, after her amour with Jupiter, is supposed to have been converted into this stream, which, to avoid the rage of Juno, sunk under ground near mount Ætna, and continued this subterraneous course to the sea. This river was navigable in the time of the Romans, and Massa says, the only one in the island that was so.—It takes its rise on the north side of Ætna, and surrounding the west skirts of the mountain, falls into the sea near the ruins of the antient Morgantio. It no longer sinks under ground as it did formerly; but it is now celebrated for a quality that it does not appear to have possessed in the times of antiquity, as none of the old writers take notice of it. It throws up, near its mouth, great quantities of very fine amber: This is carefully gathered by the peasants in the neighbourhood,



hood, and brought to Catania, where it is manufactured into the form of crosses, beads, saints, &c. and is sold at very high prices to the superstitious people on the continent. We bought several of these respectable figures, and found them electrical in a high degree; attracting feathers, straws, and other light bodies, with great force, somewhat emblematical, you will say, of what they represent.—Some pieces of this amber are full of flies and other insects, curiously preserved in its substance; and we were not a little entertained with the ingenuity of one of the artists, who has left a large blue-bottle fly with its wings expanded, exactly over the head of a saint, to represent, he told us, *lo spirito santo* coming down upon him. I have got some very fine pieces of this amber, much more electric, I think, and emitting a stronger smell, than that which comes from the Baltic. The generation of this substance has long been a controverted point amongst naturalists; nor do I believe that it is as yet perfectly ascertained, whether it is a sea or a land production.—Though it is generally supposed to be a kind of gum or bitumen, that issues from the earth in a liquid state, at which time the flies and other insects that light upon it are caught, and by their struggles to get loose, soon work themselves into its substance, which hardening round them, they are for ever preserved in the greatest perfection. Large fine pieces are constantly found at the mouth of the Simetus, supposed to have been brought down by the river; but it is singular, that none of it is ever found inland, but always on the sea-shore: They have likewise here a kind of artificial amber, made, I am told, from cobalt; but it is very different from the natural.

Not far from the mouth of this river there are two of the largest lakes in Sicily; the Beviere, and the Pantana; the first of which is supposed to have been made by Hercules; in consequence of which it was

held sacred by the antients. They are full of a variety of fish; one species of which, called Moletti, is greatly esteemed. The salting and manufacturing of these constitutes a very considerable branch of commerce at the city of Leontini, which is in that neighbourhood. This city is one of the most antient in the island, and is supposed to have been the habitation of the Lestrigons.

The Leontine fields have been much celebrated for their fertility: Both Diodorus and Pliny assert that they yielded wheat an hundred-fold, and that grain grew spontaneously here without culture: But this was only during the reign of Ceres, and is not now the case.

In a few hours sailing we came in sight of the city of Augusta, which is beautifully situated in a small island, that was formerly a peninsula: It was called by the Greeks Chersonesus, because of its supposed resemblance to the Morea. Both the city and fortifications seem considerable, and are said to contain about 9000 inhabitants. The ruins of the Little Hybla, so celebrated for its honey, lie within a few miles of this place.

Some time before our arrival at Syracuse, it fell a dead calm, and we spied a fine turtle fast asleep on the surface of the water. Our pilot ordered a profound silence, and only two oars to row very gently, that if possible we might surprize him.—Every thing was put in order, and two men were placed ready at the prow to secure the prize.—We were all attention and expectation, and durst hardly breathe for fear of disturbing him.

We moved slowly on, and the turtle lay stone-still; the two men bent down their bodies, and had their arms already in the water to seize him.—No alderman, with all deference be it spoken, ever beheld his turtle upon the table with more pleasure and security; nor  
feasted



feasted his imagination more lasciviously upon the banquet.—He was already our own in idea, and we were only thinking of the various ways in which he should be dressed.—When—how vain and transitory all human possessions! the turtle gave a plunge; slipped through their fingers, and disappeared in a moment; and with him all our hopes.—We looked very foolish at each other, without uttering a word; till Fullarton asked me in the most provoking manner in the world, whether I would chuse a little of the callipash or the callipee.—The two men shrugged up their shoulders, and said *Pazienza*; but Glover told them in a rage, that all the *pazienza* on earth was not equal to a good turtle.

Soon after this, the remains of the great Syracuse appeared; the remembrance of whose glory and magnificence, and illustrious deeds, both in arts and arms, made us for some time even forget our turtle. But alas! how are the mighty fallen! This proud city, that vied with Rome itself, is now reduced to a heap of rubbish; for what remains of it does not deserve the name of a city. We rowed round the greatest part of its walls without seeing a human creature; those very walls that were the terror of the Roman arms; from whence Archimedes battered their fleets, and with his engines lifted up their vessels out of the sea, and dashed them against the rocks. We found the interior part of the city agreed but too well with its external appearance. There was not an inn to be found; and after visiting all the monasteries, and religious fraternities in search of beds, we found the whole of them so wretchedly mean and dirty, that we preferred at last to sleep on straw; but even this we could not have clean, but are eat up with vermin of every kind.

We had letters for the Count Gaetano, who made an apology that he could not lodge us, but in other respects

respects shewed us many civilities; particularly in giving us the use of his carriage, in explaining the ruins, and in pointing out every thing that was worthy of our attention; and likewise in giving us letters of recommendation for Malta. He is a sensible man, and has writ several treatises on the antiquities of Sicily.

Of the four cities that composed the ancient Syracuse, there remains only Ortigia, by much the smallest, situated in the island of that name. It is about two miles round, and supposed to contain about 14000 inhabitants. The ruins of the other three, Tycha, Acradina, and Neapoli, are computed at twenty-two miles in circumference, but almost the whole of this space is now converted into very rich vineyards, orchards, and corn-fields; the walls of these are indeed every where built with broken marbles covered over with engravings and inscriptions, but most of them defaced and spoiled. The principal remains of antiquity are a theatre and amphitheatre, many sepulchres, the Latomie, the Catacombs, and the famous ear of Dionysius, which it was impossible to destroy.—The Latomie now form a noble subterraneous garden, and is indeed one of the most beautiful and romantic spots I ever beheld. Most of it is about one hundred feet below the level of the earth, and of a most incredible extent. The whole is hewn out of a rock as hard as marble, composed entirely of a concretion of shells, gravel, and other marine bodies. The bottom of this immense quarry, from whence probably the greatest part of Syracuse was built, is now covered with an exceeding rich soil: and as no wind from any point of the compass can possibly touch it, it is filled with an infinite variety of the very finest shrubs and fruit-trees, which bear with vast luxuriance, and are never blasted. The oranges, citrons, bergamots, pomegranates, figs, &c. are all of a remarkable large size and fine quality. Some of these



these trees, but more particularly the olives, grow out of the hard rock, where there is no mark of any soil, and exhibit a very uncommon appearance.

There is a variety of wild and romantic scenes in this curious garden; in the midst of which we were surprised by the appearance of a figure under one of the caverns, that added greatly to the dignity and solemnity of the place.—It was that of an aged man, with a long flowing white beard that reached down to his middle. His old wrinkled face and scanty grey locks pronounced him a member of some former age as well as of this. His hands, which were shook by the palsy, held a sort of pilgrim's staff; and about his neck there was a string of large beads with a crucifix hanging to its end.—Had it not been for these marks of his later existence, I don't know, but I should have asked him, whether, in his youth, he had not been acquainted with Theocritus and Archimedes, and if he did not remember the reign of Dionysius the tyrant. But he saved us the trouble, by telling us he was the hermit of the place, and belonged to a convent of Capuchins on the rock above; that he had now bid adieu to the upper world, and was determined to spend the rest of his life in this solitude, in prayer for the wretched mortals that inhabit it.

This figure, together with the scene it appears in, are indeed admirably well adapted, and reflect a mutual dignity upon each other. We left some money upon the rock: For the Capuchins, who are the greatest beggars on earth, never touch money, but save their too tender consciences, and preserve their vows unbroken, by the simple device of lifting it with a pair of pincers, and carrying it to market in their sack or cowl. This I have seen more than once.—

We were much delighted with the Latomie, and left it with regret: It is the very same that has been so much celebrated by Cicero about 1800 years ago:

“ Opus est ingens (says he) magnificum regum, ac  
“ tyrannorum.

“ tyrannorum. Totum ex faxo in mirandam altitudinem depresso, &c.” A little to the west of it is supposed to have stood the country-house, the sale of which you will remember he gives so lively and pleasant an account of; by which a goldsmith (I have forgot his name) cheated a Roman nobleman in a very ingenious manner.

The ear of Dionysius is no less a monument of the ingenuity and magnificence, than of the cruelty of that tyrant. It is a huge cavern cut out of the hard rock, exactly in the form of the human ear. The perpendicular height of it is about 80 feet, and the length of this enormous ear is not less than 250. The cavern was said to be so contrived, that every sound made in it, was collected and united into one point, as into a focus; this was called the Tympanum; and exactly opposite to it the tyrant had made a small hole, which communicated with a little apartment where he used to conceal himself. He applied his own ear to this hole, and is said to have heard distinctly every word that was spoken in the cavern below. This apartment was no sooner finished, and a proof of it made, than he put to death all the workmen that had been employed in it. He then confined all that he suspected were his enemies; and by overhearing their conversation, judged of their guilt, and condemned and acquitted accordingly.

As this chamber of Dionysius is very high in the rock, and now totally inaccessible, we had it not in our power to make proof of this curious experiment, which our guides told us had been done some years ago by the captain of an English ship.

The echo in the ear is prodigious; much superior to any other cavern I have yet seen. The holes in the rock, to which the prisoners were chained, still remain, and even the lead and iron in several of these holes. We surprised a poor young porcupine who had come here to drink, of whom our guides made  
lawful



lawful prize.—Near to this there are caverns of a very great extent, where they carry on a large manufactory of nitre, which is found in vast abundance on the sides of these caves.

The amphitheatre is in the form of a very excentric ellipse, and is much ruined; but the theatre is so entire, that most of the gradini or seats still remain. Both these are in that part of the city that was called Neapoli, or the New City. “Quarta autem est urbs  
“ (says Cicero) quæ quia postrema ædificata est,  
“ Neapolis nominatur, quam ad summam theatrum  
“ est maximum, &c.” However, it is but a small theatre in comparison of that of Taurominum. We searched amongst the sepulchres, several of which are very elegant, for that of Archimedes, but could see nothing resembling it.—At his own desire it was adorned with the figure of a sphere inscribed in a cylinder, but had been lost by his ungrateful countrymen, even before the time that Cicero was quæstor of Sicily. It is pleasant to observe, with what eagerness this great man undertakes the search of it, and with what exultation he describes his triumph on the discovery. “Ego autem cum omnia collustrarem oculis  
“ (est enim ad portas Agragianas magna frequentia  
“ sepulchrorum) animadverti columnellam non multum edumis eminentem, in qua in erat sphæræ  
“ figura et cylindri. Atque ego statim Syracusanis  
“ (erant autem principes mecum) dixi, me illud ipsum arbitrari esse quod quærerem. Immissi cum  
“ falcibus multi purgarunt, et aperuerunt locum;  
“ quo cum patefactus esset aditus ad adversam basin accessimus; apparebat epigramma ex eis posterioribus partibus versiculorum dimidiatis fere: Ita  
“ nobilissima Græciæ civitas, quondam vero etiam  
“ doctissima sui civis unius acutissimi monumentum  
“ ignorasset, nisi ab homine Arpinate didicisset, &c.”

The Catacombs are a great work; not inferior either to those of Rome or Naples, and in the same stile.—There are many remains of temples. The Duke

Duke of Montalbano, who has wrote on the antiquities of Syracuse, reckons near twenty; but there is hardly any of these that are now distinguishable. A few fine columns of that of Jupiter Olympus still remain; and the temple of Minerva (now converted into the cathedral of the city, and dedicated to the Virgin) is almost entire. They have lately built a new façade to it; but I am afraid they have not improved on the simplicity of the antique. It is full of broken pediments, and I think in a bad stile.

Ortigia, the only remaining part of Syracuse, was antiently an island; it is often denominated such by Virgil, Cicero, and many of the Greek and Latin historians. In latter ages, and probably by the ruins of this mighty city, the strait that separated it from the continent was filled up, and it had now been a peninsula for many ages, till the present king of Spain, at a vast expence, cut through the neck of land that joined it to Sicily, and has again reduced it to its primitive state.

Here he has raised a noble fortification, which appears to be almost impregnable. There are four strong gates one within the other, with each a glacis, covered-way, scarp and counterscarp, and a broad deep ditch filled with sea water, and defended by an immense number of embrasures;—but not so much as one single piece of artillery. This you will no doubt think ridiculous enough; but the ridicule is still heightened, when I assure you there is not a cannon of any kind belonging to this noble fortress, but one small battery of six pounders for saluting ships that go in and out of the port. If you are at a loss to account for this, you will please to remember that it is a work of the king of Spain. However, the ditches are very useful; they are perpetually covered with fishing boats; and they can use their nets and lines here with the greatest success, even in the most stormy weather; though I dare say this was none of the motives that induced his majesty to make them. The nobility



nobility of the place have likewise barges here for their amusement.

As the celebrated fountain of Arethusa has ever been looked upon as one of the greatest curiosities of Syracuse, you may believe we were not a little impatient to examine it: And indeed only by observing Cicero's account of it\*, we soon found it out.—It still answers exactly the description he gives, except with regard to the great quantities of fish it contained, which seem now to have abandoned it.

The fountain of Arethusa was dedicated to Diana, who had a magnificent temple near its banks, where great festivals were annually celebrated in honour of the goddess. We found a number of nymphs, up to the knees in the fountain, busy washing their garments, and we dreaded the fate of Actæon and Alpheus: But if these were of Diana's train, they are by no means so coy as they were of old; and a man would hardly chuse to run the risk of being changed either into a stag or a river for the best of them.

It is indeed an astonishing fountain, and rises at once out of the earth to the size of a river.—The poetical fictions concerning it are too well known to require that I should enumerate them. Many of the people here believe to this day, that it is the identical river Arethusa, that sinks under ground near Olympia in Greece, and, continuing its course for five or six hundred miles below the ocean, rises again in this spot.

It is truly astonishing that such a story as this should have gained such credit amongst the antients; for it is not only their poets, but natural historians and philosophers too, that take notice of it. Pliny mentions it more than once, and there are few or none of the Latin poets that it has escaped.

\* In hac insula extrema est fons aquæ dulcis, cui nomen Arethusa est, incredibili magnitudine plenissimus piscium, qui fluctatus operiretur, nisi munitione, ac mole lapidum a mari distinctus esset, &c. Cic.

This strange belief has been communicated to the Sicilian authors, and, what is amazing, there is hardly any of them that doubts of it.—Pomponius Mela, Pausanias, Massa, and Fazzello, are all of the same sentiments; to support which they tell you the old story of the golden cup won at the Olympic games, which was thrown into the Grecian Arethusa, and was soon after cast up again by the Sicilian one.

They likewise add, that it had always been observed after the great sacrifices at Olympia, the blood of which fell into that river, that the waters of Arethusa rose for several days, deeply tinged with blood.

This, like many modern miracles, was probably a trick of the priests.—Those of Diana had the charge of the fountain of Arethusa, and no doubt were much interested to support the credit of the story; for it was that goddess that converted the nymph Arethusa into a river, and conducted her by subterraneous passages from Greece to Sicily, to avoid the pursuit of Alpheus, who underwent the same fate.

At a little distance from the fountain of Arethusa, there is a very large spring of fresh water, that boils up from a considerable depth in the sea. It is called *Occhio di Zilica*, and by some Alpheus, who is supposed by the poets to have pursued Arethusa through below the sea to Sicily.

As this spring is not taken notice of by any of the great number of the antients that speak of Arethusa, it is most probable that it did not then exist; and is a part of that fountain that has since burst out before its arrival at the island of Ortigia. Had it been visible in the time of the Greeks, there is no doubt that they would have made use of this, as a strong argument to prove the submarine journey of Arethusa; as it in fact rises at some distance in the sea, and pretty much in the same direction that Greece lies from Ortigia. It sometimes boils up so strongly, that after piercing the salt water, I am told it can be taken up very little affected by it.

Syracuse



Syracuse has two harbours; the largest of which, on the south west side of Ortigia, is reckoned six miles round, and was esteemed one of the best in the Mediterranean. It is said by Diodorus to have run almost into the heart of the city, and was called Marmoreo, because entirely surrounded with buildings of marble; the entry into this harbour was strongly fortified, and the Roman fleets could never penetrate into it.

The small port is on the north-east of Ortigia, and is likewise recorded to have been highly ornamented. Fazzello says, there is still the remains of a submarine aqueduct, that runs through the middle of it, which was intended to convey the water from the fountain of Arethusa to the other parts of the city.

Near this port, they shew the spot where Archimedes's house stood; and likewise the tower from whence he is said to have set fire to the Roman gallees with his burning glasses; a story which is related by several authors, but which is now almost universally exploded, from the difficulty to conceive a burning-glass, or a concave speculum, with a focus of such an immense length as this must have required.

However, I should be apt to imagine if this is not entirely a fiction (of which there is some probability) that it was neither performed by refracting burning-glasses nor speculums, but only by means of common looking-glasses, or very clear plates of metal. Indeed, from the situation of the place it must have been done by reflection; for Archimedes's tower stood exactly on the north of the little port where the Roman fleet are said to have been moored; so that their vessels lay in a right line betwixt him and the sun at noon; and at a very small distance from the wall of the city where this tower stood. But if you will suppose this to have been performed by common burning-glasses, or by those of the parabolical kind, it will

be necessary to raise a tower of a most enormous height on the island of Ortigia, in order to interpose these glasses betwixt the sun and the Roman gallies; and even this could not have been done till late in the afternoon, when his rays are exceedingly weak. But I have very little doubt that common looking-glasses would be found all-sufficient to perform these effects.

Let us suppose that a thousand of these were made to reflect the rays upon the same point: The heat, in all probability, must be increased to a greater degree than in the focus of most burning glasses; and abundantly capable of setting fire to every combustible substance.—This experiment might be easily made by means of a battalion of men, arming each with a looking-glass instead of a firelock; and setting up a board at two or three hundred yards distance for them to fire at. I suppose it would take a considerable time before they were expert at this exercise; but, by practice, I have no doubt that they might all be brought to hit the mark instantaneously at the word of command; like the lark-catchers in some countries who are so dextrous at it, that with a small mirror they throw the rays of light on the lark, let her be ever so high in the air; which by a kind of fascination, brings down the poor animal to the snare.

You may laugh at all this; but I don't think it is impossible that a looking-glass may one day be thought as necessary an implement for a soldier as at present it is for a beau. I am very apprehensive the French will get the start of us in this signal invention; as I have been assured long ago, that few of their men ever go to the field, without first providing themselves with one of these little warlike engines, the true use of which happily for us they are as yet unacquainted with.—You will easily perceive, that if this experiment succeeds, it must alter the whole system of fortification, as well as of attack and defence;



fence; for every part of the city that is exposed to the view of the besiegers, may be easily set in a flame; and the besieged would have the same advantage over the camp of the besieging army \*.

We are already completely tired of Syracuse, which of all the wretched places we have yet met with, is by many degrees the most wretched: For besides that its inhabitants are so extremely poor and beggarly, many of them are so over-run with the itch, that we are under perpetual apprehensions, and begin to be extremely well satisfied that we could not procure beds—It is truly melancholy to think of the dismal contrast that its former magnificence makes with its present meanness. The mighty Syracuse, the most opulent and powerful of all the Grecian cities, which, by its own proper strength alone, was able, at different times, to contend against all the power of Carthage and Rome:—Which is recorded, (what the force of united nations is now incapable of) to have repulsed fleets of two thousand sail, and armies of two hundred thousand men; and contained within its own walls, what no city ever did before or since, fleets and armies that were the terror of the world. This haughty and magnificent city, reduced even below the consequence of the most insignificant burgh.—“*Sic transit gloria mundi.*”—I have not even been able to procure a table to write upon, but by way of *succedaneum* am obliged to lay a form over the back of two chairs.—We have got into the most wretched hovel you can conceive, and

\* Since the writing of these letters the author has been informed, that M. Buffon actually made this experiment—He constructed a kind of frame, in which were fixed four hundred small mirrors, disposed in such a manner, that the rays reflected from each of them fell exactly on the same point. By means of this, he melted lead at the distance of 120 feet, and set fire to a hay-stack at a much greater distance.

the most dirty ; but what is still worst of all, we can find nothing to eat ; and if we had not brought some cold fowls along with us, we might have starved. Glover is lamenting sadly for the loss of our turtle, and swears our Catania sailors ought to be hanged. —The heat has been considerably greater here than at Catania. —The thermometer is just now at 78. —There is an old remark made on the climate of this place by some of the antients, which is still said to hold good ; that at no season, the sun has ever been invisible during a whole day at Syracuse. I find it mentioned by several Sicilian authors, but shall not vouch for the truth of it. —Adieu. —My next will probably be from Malta ; for we shall sail tomorrow if it is possible to procure a vessel.

Ever yours.

### LETTER XIII.

Capo Passero, June 3.

**A**S we found the mighty city of Syracuse so reduced, that it could not afford beds and lodging to three weary travellers, we agreed to abridge our stay in it ; and accordingly hired a Maltese sparono to carry us to that island : This is a small six-oar'd boat, made entirely for speed, to avoid the African pirates, and other Barbareque vessels, with which these seas are infested ; but so flat and so narrow, that they are not able to bear any sea, and of consequence keep always as near the coast as possible.

On the 2d of June, by day-break, we left the Marmoreo, or great port of Syracuse ; and although the wind was exactly contrary and pretty strong, by the force of their oars, which they manage with great dexterity, we got on at the rate of four miles an hour.



hour. They do not pull their oars as we do, but push them like the Venetian Gondoliers; always fronting the prow of the boat, and seldom or never sit down while they row; allowing the whole weight of their bodies to be exerted every stroke of the oar. This gives a prodigious momentum, and is certainly much more forcible than a simple exertion of the muscles of the arm.

About ten o'clock the wind became favourable, when we went indeed at an immense rate. At twelve it blew a hurricane, and with some difficulty we got under shore, but the wind was so exceedingly violent, that even there we had like to have been overset, and we were obliged to run aground to save us from this disaster. Here we were a good deal annoyed by the sand carried about by the wind; however, the hurricane was soon over, and we again put to sea with a favourable gale, which in a few hours carried us to Capo Passero.

In this little storm we were a good deal amused with the behaviour of our Sicilian servant, who at land is a fellow of undaunted courage, of which we have had many proofs; but here (I don't know why) it entirely forsook him, although there was in fact no real danger, for we never were more than 100 yards from the shore. He gave himself up to despair, and called upon all his saints for protection, and never again recovered his confidence all the rest of this little voyage; perpetually wishing himself back at Naples, and swearing that no earthly temptation should ever induce him to go to sea again. The same fellow, but a few days ago, mounted a most vicious horse, and without the least fear or concern galloped along the side of a precipice, where every moment we expected to see him dashed to pieces; so singular and various are the different modes of fear and of courage.

Capo Passero, antiently called Pachinus, is the remotest and most southerly point of Sicily. It is not a peninsula, as represented in all the maps, but a wretched barren island, of about a mile round; with a fort and a small garrison to protect the neighbouring country from the incursions of the Barbary corsairs, who are often very troublesome on this part of the coast. This little island and fort lie about a mile and a half distant from the small creek of which we have taken possession; and are separated from the rest of Sicily by a strait of about half a mile broad.

Our pilot told us that we must not think of Malta, which is almost 100 miles off, till there were more settled appearances of good weather.

As there is no habitation here of any kind, we searched about, till at last we found a small cavern, where we made a very comfortable dinner. We then sallied forth to examine the face of the country, as well as to try if we could shoot something for our supper.—We found that we had now got into a very different world from any thing we had yet seen. The country here is exceedingly barren, and to a considerable distance produces neither corn nor wine: But the fields are covered over with an infinite variety of flowers and of flowering shrubs, and the rocks are every where entirely covered with capers, which are just now fit for gathering. If we had vinegar, we could soon have pickled hogsheds of them.

We found here, in the greatest perfection, that beautiful shrub called the *Palmeta*, resembling a small palm-tree, with an elegant fine flower; but, to our great mortification, the seed is not yet ripe. We likewise found great quantities of a blue everlasting flower, which I don't remember to have seen in Miller, or any of our botanical books. The stem rises about a foot high, and is crowned with a large cluster of small blue flowers, the leaves of which are of a dry substance like the *Elychrysum* or globe *Amaranthus*.



thus. Some of these are of a purple colour, but most of them blue. I have gathered a pretty large quantity for the speculation of the botanists on our return.

We found a good swimming-place, which is always one of the first things we look out for, as this exercise constitutes one of the principal pleasures of our expedition.

So soon as it was dark, we got on board our little boat, and rowed about a hundred yards out to sea, where we cast anchor; our pilot assured us that this was absolutely necessary, as the people in this part of the country are little better than savages; and, were we to stay at land, might very possibly come down during the night, and rob and murder us.

He likewise told us, that the Turks had made frequent invasions upon this point of the island, which, of all others, lay most exposed to their depredations: That lately three of their chebecks ran into a small harbour a few miles from this, and carried off six merchant ships; and that very often some of their light vessels were seen hovering off the coast: That the only way to be in perfect security from those two enemies by sea and land, was to chuse a place on the coast so deep, that the banditti by land could not wade into us; and at the same time so shallow, as to be equally inaccessible to the banditti by sea.

When we found ourselves thus in security on both hands, we wrapt ourselves up in our cloaks, and fell asleep: However, we had but a very uncomfortable night; the wind rose, and the motion of our little bark was exceeding disagreeable, and made us heartily sick. As soon as the day began to appear, we made them pull into shore; when we were immediately cured of our sickness; and as the weather continues still unfavourable, we have fallen upon a variety of amusements to pass the time.

We have been thrice in the water, which is warm and pleasant; and in the intervals, I have writ you this letter on the top of a large basket, in which we carry our sea-store. We have likewise gathered shells, pieces of coral, of sponge, and several beautiful kinds of sea-weed. The rocks here are all of petrified sand and gravel run together, and become as hard as granite. There are many shells and other marine substances mixed in their composition, which renders them objects of curiosity in the eye of a naturalist.

This morning we made a kind of tent of a sail, drawn over the point of a rock, and fixed with an oar, by way of pole. Here we breakfasted most luxuriously on excellent tea, and honey of Hybla.

I was interrupted in this part of my letter, by an officer from the fort of Capo Passero. He tells us, that we may give over all thoughts of getting farther for these six days.—What do you think is his reason?—I own I was in some pain till he mentioned it.—This wind set in exactly as the moon entered her second quarter, and it will certainly continue till she is full. There is a rascal for you!—If he is telling truth, I shall certainly study astrology. He likewise told us, that two galliots had been seen off the coast; and desired us to be upon our guard; but I own, the moon, together with other circumstances, has considerably weakened his evidence with me.

We have learned from his conversation, that the fort of Capo Passero is made use of as a place of exile for the delinquents in the army; of which number I have not the least doubt that he is one. He told us there were two near relations of the viceroy, that had been lately sent there for misdemeanors; that for his part, he belonged to a very agreeable garrison; but as he loved retirement, he chose to accompany them. However, his countenance told a very different story; and said, in strong language, that he was a *tres mauvais sujet*. Besides, he is a stupid fellow,



fellow, and has tired me. I could learn nothing from him.

It must be owned, this is an excellent place of exile for a young rake, who wants to shew away in the beau monde. It is not within many miles of any town or village; so that the gentlemen may enjoy retirement in its utmost perfection.

We were surprised to find on this coast quantities of the true pumice-stones, which at first we supposed to have been brought by the sea from *Ætna*, till we likewise discovered many large pieces of lava, which makes us imagine there must have been some eruption of fire in this part of the island; yet I see no conical mountain, or any other indication of it.

If our officer's prognostications prove true, and we are detained here any longer, I shall examine the country to a much greater distance. The wind continues directly contrary; the sea is very high in the canal of Malta, and our Sicilian servant is in a sad trepidation.—But I see Glover and Fullarton coming for their dinner; so I shall be obliged to give up the basket.—This sea-air gives one a monstrous appetite; and, it is with grief I mention it, we are already brought to short allowance:—Only one cold fowl amongst three of us; all three pretty sharp set, I assure you.—These infamous rascals to lose our turtle!—They have spied a fishing-boat, and Glover is hal-ling her as loud as he can roar,—but, alas! she is too far off to hear him.—They have just fired a gun to bring her to, and happily she obeys the signal, so there is still hopes; otherwise we shall soon be reduced to bread and water. Our tea and sugar too are just upon a close, which is the cruellest article of all; but we have plenty of good bread and Hybla honey; so we are in no danger of starving.

We have likewise made an admirable and a very comfortable disposition for our night's lodging. The *sparonaro* is so very narrow, that it is impossible for  
us

us all to lie in it; besides, we are eat up with vermin, and have nothing but the hard boards to lie on: All these considerations, added to the cursed swinging of the boat, and the horrid sickness it occasions, have determined us rather to trust ourselves to the mercy of the banditti, than to lie another night at sea: Besides, we have made the happiest discovery in the world; a great quantity of fine, soft, dry sea-weed, lying under the shelter of a rock, and seems destined by Providence for our bed: Over this we are going to stretch a sail, and expect to sleep most luxuriously; but to prevent all danger from a surprise, we have agreed to stand sentry by turns, with Fullarton's double barrell'd gun, well primed and loaded for the reception of the enemy; at the first discharge of which, and not before, the whole guard is to turn out, with all the remaining part of our artillery, and small arms; and as our situation is a very advantageous one, I think we shall be able to make a stout defence.

As we are six in number, three masters and three servants, the duty, you see, will be but trifling; and five of us will always sleep in security. Our guard, to be sure, might have been stronger; but our sparonaro men have absolutely refused to be of the party, having much more confidence in their own element; however, they have promised, in case of an attack, immediately to come to our assistance. I think the disposition is far from being a bad one, and we are not a little vain of our generalship.

The fishing-boat is now arrived, and they have bought some excellent little fishes, which are already on the fire. Adieu. These fellows are roaring for their cold fowl, and I can command the basket no longer.

Ever yours.

LETTER



## LETTER XIV.

Malta, June 4th.

**I**N spite of appearances, and our officer's wise prognostications, the wind changed at night, and we got under sail by six o'clock: We passed the straits, and coasted along till eight, when we landed to cook some macaroni we had purchased of our sailors, and try if we could not shoot something for sea-store, as we have still a long voyage before us.

We came to the side of a sulphureous lake, the smell of which was so strong, that we perceived it upwards of a mile distant. We found the water boiling up with great violence in many places, though the heat at the banks of the lake is very inconsiderable. However, this, added to the pumice and lava we found near Capo Passero, tends greatly to confirm us in the opinion, that this part of the island, as well as about *Ætna*, has, in former ages, been subject to eruptions of subterraneous fire.

I think it is more than probable, that this is the celebrated *Camerina*, which *Æneas* saw immediately after his passing *Pachynus*, (or *Capo Passero*) which, *Virgil* says, the Fates had decreed should never be drained:

“ Hinc altas cautes projectaque saxa *Pachyni*  
“ Radimus; et fatis nunquam concessa moveri  
“ Adparat *Camarina* procul.”

*Virgil* had good reason to say so; for the level of the lake or marsh, (it being something betwixt the two) is at least as low as that of the sea, and consequently never could be drained.

It is surrounded with a variety of very fine evergreens and flowering shrubs, of which the palmeta, and the arbutus or strawberry tree, are the most beautiful.

tiful. We saw a great many wild-fowl; but, what surprised me, in so unfrequented a place, they were so shy, that there was no getting near them: There was one kind, in particular, that attracted our attention; it was of the size and form of a grey plover, and flew in the same manner; but had a tail of a great length, which seemed to be composed only of two small flexible feathers, that made a very uncommon appearance in the air. After using all our art to shoot one of them, we were obliged to give up the attempt.

Here we killed a small black snake, which, I think, answers the description I have seen of the asp. We dissected out its tongue, the end of which appears sharp like a sting, and I suppose is one, as it darted it out with great violence against our sticks, when we presented them to it. Now, as all animals, when attacked, make use of those weapons that Nature has armed them with for their defence, it appeared evident to us, (supposing this rule a just one) that this animal seemed conscious of a power of hurting in its tongue; and we have been more fully convinced of it from dissection. The sting appears considerably larger than that of a bee. We found a little bag at the other end of the tongue, and probably, if we had had a microscope, should have found the tongue perforated. This snake had no teeth; but very hard gums. I have taken care to preserve the tongue for your inspection.

As I think it has always been supposed, that serpents hurt only with their teeth, I thought this might be worthy of your notice. It is true, that the darting out of the tongue is a trick of the whole serpent tribe; but this animal seemed to do it with peculiar ferocity, and to hit it with violence against our sticks. It was this that put us upon the examination.

I don't recollect that this singularity is mentioned in any book of natural history, but possibly I may be mistaken; nor indeed do I remember either to have  
seen



seen or heard of any animal armed in this manner :—Unless you will suppose me to adopt the sentiments of poor Mr. S——, who, ever since his marriage, alleges that the tongues of many females are formed after this singular manner ; and remarks one peculiarity, that the sting seldom or never appears till after matrimony.—He is very learned on this subject, and thinks it may possibly have proceeded from their original connection with the serpent.—Let this be as it may, I sincerely hope that you and I shall never have such good reason for adopting that opinion.

A little after nine we embarked. The night was delightful ; but the wind had died away about sunset, and we were obliged to ply our oars to get into the canal of Malta. The coast of Sicily began to recede ; and, in a short time, we found ourselves in the ocean. There was a profound silence, except the noise of the waves breaking on the distant shore, which only served to render it more solemn. It was a dead calm, and the moon shone bright on the waters. The waves, from the late storm, were still high ; but smooth and even, and followed one another with a slow and an equal pace.—The scene had naturally sunk us into meditation ; we had remained near an hour without speaking a word, when our sailors began their midnight hymn to the Virgin. The music was simple, solemn, and melancholy, and in perfect harmony with the scene, and with all our feelings. They beat exact time with their oars, and observed the harmony and the cadence with the utmost precision. We listened with infinite pleasure to this melancholy concert, and felt the vanity of operas and oratorios.—There is often a solemnity and a pathetic in the modulation of these simple productions, that causes a much stronger effect, than the composition of the greatest masters, assisted by all the boasted rules of counter-point.

At

At last they sung us asleep, and we awoke forty miles distant from Sicily. We were now on the main ocean, and saw no land but mount *Ætna*; which is the perpetual polar star of these seas. We had a fine breeze, and about two o'clock we discovered the island of Malta; and in less than three hours more, we reached the city of Valletta. The approach of the island is very fine, although the shore is rather low and rocky. It is every where made inaccessible by an infinite number of fortifications. The rock, in many places, has been sloped into the form of a glacis, with strong parapets and intrenchments running behind it, so as to render a landing altogether impracticable.

The entry into the port is very narrow, and is commanded by a strong castle on either side. We were haled from each of these, and obliged to give a strict account of ourselves; and on our arrival at the side of the key, we were visited by an officer from the health-office, and obliged to give oath with regard to the circumstances of our voyage.—He behaved in the most polite manner, and immediately sent us Mr. Rutter, the English consul, for whom we had letters of recommendation.

On getting to land, we found ourselves in a new world indeed.—The streets crowded with well dressed people, who have all the appearance of health and affluence; whereas at Syracuse, there was scarce a creature to be seen; and even those had the appearance of disease and wretchedness.—Mr. Rutter immediately conducted us to an inn, which had more the appearance of a palace. We have had an excellent supper, and good Burgundy; and as this is the king's birth day, we have almost got tipsey to his health. We are now going into clean, comfortable beds, in expectation of the sweetest slumbers.—Think of the luxury of this, after being five long days without throwing off our clothes.—Good night. I  
would



would not lose a moment of it for the world — People may say what they please, but there is no enjoyment in living in perpetual ease and affluence, and the true luxury is only to be attained by undergoing a few hardships.—But this is no time to philosophize. So adieu.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XV.

Malta, June 5th.

OUR banker, Mr. Poufilach, was here before we were up, inviting us to dine with him at his country-house, from whence we are just now returned. He gave us a noble entertainment, served on handsome plate, with an elegant desert, and a very great variety of wines.

After dinner we went to visit the principal villas of the island; particularly those of the grand master, and the general of the gallies, which lie contiguous to each other. These are nothing great or magnificent; but they are admirably contrived for a hot climate, where, of all things, shade is the most desirable. The orange groves are indeed very fine, and the fruit they bear are superior to any thing I have ever seen, either in Spain or Portugal.

The aspect of the country is far from being pleasing: The whole island is a great rock of very white free-stone, and the soil that covers this rock, in most places, is not more than five or six inches deep; yet, what is very extraordinary, we found their crop in general was exceedingly abundant. They account for it from the copious dews that fall during the spring and summer months; and pretend likewise, that there is a moisture in the rock below the soil, that is of great advantage to the corn and cotton, keeping its roots perpetually moist and cool, without which  
singular

singular quality, they say, they could have no crops at all, the heat of the sun is so exceedingly violent.

Their barley harvest has been over some time ago; and they are just now finishing that of the wheat. The whole island only produces corn sufficient to support its inhabitants for five months, or little more; but the crop they most depend upon, is the cotton. They began sowing it about three weeks ago, and it will be finished in a week more. The time of reaping it is in the month of October and beginning of November.

They pretend that the cotton produced from this plant, which is sown and reaped in four months, is of a much superior quality to that of the cotton-tree. I compared them, but I cannot say I found it so; this is indeed the finest, but that of the cotton-tree is by much the strongest texture. The plant rises to the height of a foot and a half, and is covered with a number of nuts or pods full of cotton: These, when ripe, they are at great pains to cut off, every morning before sun-rise; for the heat of the sun immediately turns the cotton yellow; which, indeed, we saw from those pods they save for seed.

They manufacture their cotton into a great variety of stuffs. Their stockings are exceedingly fine. Some of them, they assured us, had been sold for ten sequins a pair. Their coverlets and blankets are esteemed all over Europe. Of these the principal manufactures are established in the little island of Gozzo, where the people are said to be more industrious than those of Malta, as they are more excluded from the world, and have fewer inducements to idleness. Here the sugar-cane is still cultivated with success, though not in any considerable quantity.

The Maltese oranges certainly deserve the character they have, of being the finest in the world. The season continues for upwards of seven months; from  
November



November till the middle of June; during which time, these beautiful trees are always covered with great abundance of this delicious fruit. Many of them are of the red kind, much superior, in my opinion, to the others, which are by far too luscious. They are produced, I am told, from the common orange bud, engrafted on the pomegranate stock. The juice of these oranges is red as blood, and of a fine flavour. The greatest part of their crop is sent every year in presents to the different courts of Europe, and to the relations of the chevaliers. It was not without a good deal of difficulty that we procured a few chests for our friends at Naples.

The industry of the Maltese, in cultivating their little island, is altogether inconceivable. There is not an inch of ground lost in any part of it; and where there was not soil enough, they have brought over ships and boats loaded with it from Sicily, where there is plenty, and to spare. The whole island is full of inclosures of freestone, which gives the country a very uncouth and a very barren aspect, and in summer reflects such a light and heat, that it is exceedingly disagreeable and offensive to the eyes. The inclosures are very small and irregular, according to the inclination of the ground. This, they say, they are obliged to observe, notwithstanding the deformity it occasions, otherwise the floods, to which they are subject, would carry off their soil.

The island is covered over with country houses and villages, besides seven cities, for so they term them; but there are only two, the Valetta and the Citta Vecchia, that by any means deserve that appellation. Every little village has a noble church, elegantly finished and adorned with statues of marble, rich tapestry, and a large quantity of silver plate. They are by much the handsomest country churches I have ever seen.—But I am interrupted in my writing, by the beginning (I am told) of a very fine show. If

it is so, I shall give you some account of it by and by.

Eleven at night. The show is now finished, and has afforded us great entertainment. It was the departure of a Maltese squadron, to assist the French against the Bey of Tunis, who it seems has fallen under the displeasure of the grand monarch, because he refused to deliver up, without ransom, the Corsican slaves that were taken before the French were in possession of that island. The squadron consisted of three galleys, the largest with nine hundred men, each of the others with seven hundred; three galliots, and several *scampavias*, so called from their exceeding swiftness. These immense bodies were all worked by oars, and moved with great regularity. The admiral went first, and the rest in order, according to their dignity. The sea was crowded with boats, and the ramparts and fortifications were filled with company. The port resounded on all sides, by the discharge of heavy artillery, which was answered by the galleys and galliots as they left the harbour. As the echo is here surprisingly great, it produced a very noble effect.

There were about thirty knights in each galley, making signals all the way to their mistresses, who were weeping for their departure upon the bastions; for these gentlemen pay almost as little regard to their vows of chastity as the priests and confessors do. After viewing the show from the ramparts, we took a boat and followed the squadron for some time, and did not return till long after sun-set.

We have been admiring the wonderful strength of this place, both by nature and art.—It is certainly the happiest situation that can be imagined. The city stands upon a peninsula, betwixt two of the finest ports in the world, which are defended by almost impregnable fortifications. That on the south-east side of the city is the largest; it runs about two miles  
into



into the heart of the island, and is so very deep, and surrounded by such high grounds and fortifications, that they assured us, the largest ships of war might ride in it in the most stormy weather, almost without a cable.

This beautiful basin is divided into five distinct harbours, all equally safe, and each capable of containing an immense number of shipping. The mouth of the harbour is scarcely a quarter of a mile broad, and is commanded on each side by batteries that would tear the strongest ship to pieces before she could possibly enter. Besides this, it is fronted by a quadruple battery, one above the other, the largest of which is a *fleur d'eau*, or on a level with the water; these are mounted with 80 of their heaviest artillery: So that this harbour, I think, may really be considered as impregnable; and indeed the Turks have ever found it so, and I believe ever will.

The harbour on the north side of the city, altho' they only use it for fishing, and as a place of quarantine, would, in any other part of the world, be considered as inestimable. It is likewise defended by very strong fortifications; and in the centre of the basin there is an island, on which they have built a castle and a lazaret.

The fortifications of Malta are indeed a most stupendous work. All the boasted catacombs of Rome and Naples, are a trifle to the immense excavations that have been made in this little island. The ditches, of a vast size, are all cut out of the solid rock. These extend for a great many miles, and raise our astonishment to think, that so small a nation has ever been able to execute them.

One side of the island is so completely fortified by nature, that there was nothing left for art. The rock is of a great height, and absolutely perpendicular from the sea for several miles. It is very singular, that on this side there are still the vestiges of several an-

tient roads, with the tracks of carriages worn deep in the rocks: These roads are now terminated by the precipice, with the sea beneath; and shew to a demonstration that this island has in former ages been of a much larger size than it is at present; but the convulsion that occasioned its diminution, is probably much beyond the reach of any history or tradition. It has often been observed, notwithstanding the very great distance of mount *Ætna*, that this island has generally been more or less affected by its eruptions; and they think it probable, that on some of these occasions a part of it may have been shaken into the sea.

We have now an opportunity of observing, that one half of mount *Ætna* is clearly discovered from Malta. They reckon the distance near 200 Italian miles. And the people here assure us, that in the great eruptions of that mountain, their whole island is illuminated; and, from the reflection in the water, there appears a great track of fire in the sea, all the way from Malta to Sicily. The thundering of the mountain is likewise distinctly heard.—Good night.—I am fatigued with this day's expedition, and shall finish my letter to-morrow.

June 6th. As the city of Valetta is built upon a hill, none of the streets except the key are level; they are all paved with white freestone, which not only creates a great dust, but from its colour is likewise so offensive to the eyes, that most of the people here are remarkably weak sighted. The principal buildings are the palace of the grand master, the infirmary, the arsenal, the inns or hotels of the Seven Tongues, and the great church of St. John. The palace is a very noble though a plain structure, and the grand master (who studies conveniency more than magnificence) is more comfortably and commodiously lodged than any prince in Europe, the king of Sardinia



dinia perhaps only excepted. The great stair is by much the easiest and best I ever saw.

St. John's is a very magnificent church; the pavement, in particular, is reckoned the richest in the world. It is entirely composed of sepulchral monuments of the finest marbles, porphyry, lapis lazuli, and a variety of other valuable stones; admirably joined together, and at the most incredible expence, representing in a kind of Mosaic the arms, insignia, &c. of the persons whose names they are intended to commemorate. In the magnificence of these monuments the heirs of the grand masters and commanders have long vied with each other.

We went this day to see the celebration of their church service; it seems to be more overcharged with parade and ceremony than what I have ever observed even in any other catholic country. The number of genuflections before the altar, the kissing of the prior's hand, the holding up of his robes by the subaltern priests, the ceremony of throwing incense upon all the knights of the great cross, and neglecting the poorer knights, with many other articles, appeared to us highly ridiculous, and most essentially different indeed from that purity and simplicity of worship that constitutes the very essence of true christianity, and of which the great pattern they pretend to copy set so very noble an example.

This day (the 6th of June) is held as a solemn thanksgiving, for their deliverance from a terrible conspiracy, that was formed about twenty-one years ago by the Turkish slaves, at one stroke to put an end to the whole order of Malta. All the fountains of the place were to be poisoned, and every slave had taken a solemn oath to put his master to death.

It was discovered by a Jew, who kept a coffee-house; he understood the Turkish language, and overheard some discourse that he thought suspicious. He went immediately and informed the grand master.

The suspected persons were instantly seized and put to the torture, and soon confessed the whole plot. The executions were very terrible; one hundred and twenty-five were put to death by various torments; some were burned alive, some were broke on the wheel, and some were torn to pieces by the four galleys rowing different ways, and each bringing off its limb. Since that time they have been much more strictly watched, and have less liberty than formerly. Adieu. I shall write to you again before we leave Malta.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER XVI.

Malta, June 7.

**T**HIS day we made an expedition through the island, in coaches drawn by one mule each, the only kind of vehicle the place affords. Our conductors could speak nothing but Arabic, which is still the language of the common people of Malta; so that, you may believe, we did not reap much benefit from their conversation. We went first to the antient city of Melita, which is near the centre of the island, and commands a view of the whole; and in clear weather, they pretend, of part of Barbary and of Sicily. The city is strongly fortified, and is governed by an officer called the Hahem: He received us very politely, and shewed us the old palace, which is not indeed much worth the seeing. The cathedral is a very fine church; and although of an exceeding large size, is at present entirely hung with crimson damask richly laced with gold.

The catacombs, not far from this city, are a great work; they are said to extend for fifteen miles under ground; however, this you are obliged to take on the credit of your guides, as it would rather



ther be risking too much to put it to the trial. Many people, they assure us, have been lost from advancing too far in them; the prodigious number of branches making it next to impossible to find the way out again.

From this we went to see the Bosquetta, where the grand master has his country palace; by the accounts we had of it at Valetta, we expected to find a large forest well stored with deer, and every kind of game, as they talked much to us of the great hunts that were made every year in these woods.—We were not a little surprised to find only a few scattered trees, and about half a dozen deer; but as this is the only thing like a wood in the island, it is esteemed a very great curiosity. The palace is as little worth seeing as the forest, though indeed the prospect from the top of it is very fine. The furniture is three or four hundred years old, and in the most Gothic stile that can be imagined: But indeed the grand master seldom or never resides here.

The great source of water that supplies the city of Valetta, takes its rise near to this place; and there is an aqueduct composed of some thousand arches that conveys it from thence to the city. The whole of this immense work was finished at the private expence of one of the grand masters.

Not far from the old city there is a small church, dedicated to St. Paul; and just by the church a miraculous statue of the saint, with a viper on his hand, supposed to be placed on the very spot on which the house stood where he was received after his shipwreck on this island, and where he shook the viper off his hand into the fire without being hurt by it; at which time, the Maltese assure us, the saint cursed all the venomous animals of the island, and banished them for ever; just as St. Patrick treated those of his favourite isle. Whether this be the cause of it or not, we shall leave to divines to determine; (though if it

had, I think St. Luke would have mentioned it in the Acts of the Apostles) but the fact is certain, that there are no venomous animals in Malta. They assured us, that vipers had been brought from Sicily, and died almost immediately on their arrival.

Adjoining to the church, there is the celebrated grotto in which the saint was imprisoned. It is looked upon with the utmost reverence and veneration; and if the stories they tell of it be true, it is well intitled to it all. It is exceedingly damp, and produces (I believe by a kind of petrification from the water) a whitish kind of stone, which, they assure us, when reduced to powder, is a sovereign remedy in many diseases, and saves the lives of thousands every year. There is not a house in the island that is not provided with it; and they tell us, there are many boxes of it sent annually not only to Sicily and Italy, but likewise to the Levant and the East-Indies; and (what is considered as a daily standing miracle) notwithstanding this perpetual consumption, it has never been exhausted, nor even sensibly diminished; the saint always taking care to supply them with a fresh quantity the day following.

You may be sure we did not fail to stuff our pockets with this wonderful stone; I suspected they would have prevented us, as I did not suppose the saint would have worked for heretics; however, neither he nor the priests had any objection, and we gave them a few Pauls \* more for their civility. I tasted some of it, and believe it is a very harmless thing; it tastes like exceeding bad Magnesia, and I believe has pretty much the same effects; they give about a tea spoonful of it to children in the small-pox and in fevers. It produces a copious sweat about an hour after, and, they say, never fails to be of service; it is likewise esteemed a certain remedy against the bite of all

\* A small silver coin.



venomous animals. There is a very fine statue of St. Paul in the middle of this grotto, to which they ascribe great powers.

We were delighted, on our way back to the city, with the beauty of the setting-sun ; much superior, I think, to what I have ever observed it in Italy. The whole of the eastern part of the heavens, for half an hour after sun-set, was of a fine deep purple, and made a beautiful appearance : This the Maltese tell us is generally the case every evening, at this season of the year.

I forgot to say any thing of our presentation to the grand master, for which I ask pardon both of you and him.—His name is Pinto, and of a Portuguese family. He has now been at the head of this singular little nation for upwards of thirty years. He received us with great politeness, and was highly pleased to find that some of us had been in Portugal. He mentioned the intimate commercial connections that had so long subsisted betwixt our nations, and expressed his desire of being of service to us, and of rendering our stay in his island as agreeable as possible. He is a clear-headed, sensible, little old man ; which, at so advanced a period of life, is very uncommon. Although he is considerably upwards of ninety, he retains all the faculties of his mind in their greatest perfection. He has no minister, but manages every thing himself, and has immediate information of the most minute occurrences. He walks up and down stairs, and even to church, without assistance ; and has the appearance as if he would still live for a good many years. His household attendance and court are all very princely ; and, as grand master of Malta, he is more absolute, and possesses more power than most sovereign princes. His titles are Serene Highness and Eminence ; and as he has the disposal of all lucrative offices, he makes of his councils what he pleases ; besides, in all the councils that compose the jurisdiction of this little nation,

tion, he himself presides, and enjoys two votes. Since he was chosen grand master, he has already given away 126 commanderies, some of them worth upwards of 2000*l.* a year, besides priories and other offices of profit.—He has the disposal of twenty-one commanderies and one priory every five years; and as there are always a number of expectants, he is exceedingly caressed and courted.

He is chosen by a committee of twenty-one, which committee is nominated by the seven nations, three out of each nation. The election must be over within three days after the death of the former grand master; and during these three days, there is scarce a soul that sleeps at Malta: All is cabal and intrigue, and most of the knights are masked, to prevent their particular attachments and connections from being known: the moment the election is over, every thing returns again to its former channel.

The land force of Malta is equal to the number of men in the island fit to bear arms. They have about 500 regulars belonging to the ships of war; and 150 compose the guard of the prince. The two islands of Malta and Gozzo contain about 150,000 inhabitants. The men are exceeding robust and hardy. I have seen them row for ten or twelve hours without intermission, and without even appearing to be fatigued.

Their sea force consists of four galleys, three galiots, four ships of sixty guns, and a frigate of thirty-six, besides a number of the quick-sailing little vessels called Scampavias (literally, Runaways.) Their ships, galleys, and fortifications, are not only well supplied with excellent artillery, but they have likewise invented a kind of ordnance of their own, unknown to all the world besides. For we found, to our no small amazement, that the rocks were not only cut into fortifications, but likewise into artillery to defend



send these fortifications ; being hollowed out in many places into the form of immense mortars. The charge is said to be about a barrel of gunpowder, over which they place a large piece of wood, made exactly to fit the mouth of the chamber. On this they heap a great quantity of cannon balls, shells, or other deadly materials, and when an enemy's ship approaches the harbour, they fire the whole into the air ; and they pretend it produces a very great effect, making a shower for two or three hundred yards round that would sink any vessel.

Notwithstanding the supposed bigotry of the Maltese, the spirit of toleration is so strong, that a mosque has lately been built for their sworn enemies the Turks. Here the poor slaves are allowed to enjoy their religion in peace. It happened lately that some idle boys disturbed them during their service ; they were immediately sent to prison, and severely punished. The police indeed is much better regulated than in the neighbouring countries, and assassinations and robberies are very uncommon ; the last of which crimes the grand master punishes with the utmost severity. But he is said, perhaps in compliance with the prejudice of his nation, to be much more relax with regard to the first.

Perhaps Malta is the only country in the world where duelling is permitted by law.—As their whole establishment is originally founded on the wild and romantic principles of chivalry, they have ever found it too inconsistent with these principles to abolish duelling ; but they have laid it under such restrictions as greatly to reduce its danger. These are curious enough.—The duellists are obliged to decide their quarrel in one particular street of the city ; and if they presume to fight any where else, they are liable to the rigour of the law. But what is not less singular, and much more in their favour, they are obliged, under the most severe penalties, to put up their sword, when

when ordered so to do, by a *woman*, a *priest*, or a *knight*.

Under these limitations, in the midst of a great city, one would imagine it almost impossible that a duel could ever end in blood; however, this is not the case:—A cross is always painted on the wall opposite to the spot where a knight has been killed, in commemoration of his fall.—We counted about twenty of these crosses.

About three months ago, two knights had a dispute at a billiard table.—One of them, after giving a great deal of abusive language, added a blow; but to the astonishment of all Malta (in whose annals there is not a similar instance) after so great a provocation, he absolutely refused to fight his antagonist.—The challenge was repeated, and he had time to reflect on the consequences, but still he refused to enter the lists.—He was condemned to make *amende honorable* in the great church of St. John for forty-five days successively; then to be confined in a dungeon without light for five years, after which he is to remain a prisoner in the castle for life. The unfortunate young man who received the blow is likewise in disgrace, as he has not had an opportunity of wiping it out in the blood of his adversary.

This has been looked upon as a very singular affair, and is still one of the principal topics of conversation. The first part of the sentence has already been executed, and the poor wretch is now in his dungeon. Nor is it thought that any abatement will be made in what remains.

If the legislature in other countries punished with equal rigour those that do fight, as it does in this those that do not, I believe we should soon have an end of duelling: But I should imagine the punishment for fighting ought never to be a capital one, (but rather something ignominious) and the punishment



ment for not fighting should always be so, or at least some severe corporal punishment; for ignominy will have as little effect on the person who is willing to submit to the appellation of a coward, as the fear of death on one who makes it his glory to despise it.

The Maltese still talk with horror of a storm that happened here on the 29th of October, 1757, which, as it was of a very singular nature, I shall translate you some account of it from a little book they have given me, written on that subject.

About three quarters of an hour after midnight, there appeared to the south-west of the city a great black cloud, which, as it approached, changed its colour, till at last it became like a flame of fire mixed with black smok. A dreadful noise was heard on its approach, that alarmed the whole city. It passed over part of the port, and came first upon an English ship, which in an instant was torn to pieces, and nothing left but the hulk; part of the masts, sails, and cordage were carried along with the cloud to a considerable distance. The small boats and fellouques that fell in its way were all broken to pieces, and sunk. The noise increased and became more frightful. A sentinel, terrified at its approach, run into his box: Both he and it were lifted up and carried into the sea, where he perished. It then traversed a considerable part of the city, and laid in ruins almost every thing that dared to oppose it.—Several houses were laid level with the ground, and it did not leave one steeple in its passage. The bells of some of them, together with the spires, were carried to a considerable distance. The roofs of the churches were demolished and beat down, which, if it had happened in the day time, must have occasioned a dreadful carnage, as all the people would have immediately run to the churches.

It went off at the north-east point of the city, and, demolishing the light-house, is said to have mounted  
up

up into the air, with a frightful noise, and passed over the sea to Sicily, where it tore up some trees, and did other damage, but nothing considerable, as its fury had been mostly spent upon Malta. The number of killed and wounded amounted to near 200; and the loss of shipping, houses, and churches, was very considerable.

Several treatises have been written to account for this singular phænomenon, but I have found nothing at all satisfactory. The sentiments of the people are concise and positive. They declare, with one voice, that it was a legion of devils let loose to punish them for their sins. There are a thousand people in Malta that will take their oath they saw them within the cloud, all as black as pitch, and breathing out fire and brimstone. They add, that if there had not been a few godly people amongst them, their whole city would certainly have been involved in one universal destruction.

The horse-races of Malta are of a very singular kind. They are performed without either saddle, bridle, whip, or spur; and yet the horses are said to run full speed, and to afford a great deal of diversion. They are accustomed to the ground for some weeks before; and although it is entirely over rock and pavement, there are very seldom any accidents. They have races of asses and mules performed in the same manner, four times every year. The rider is only furnished with a machine like a shoemaker's awl, to prick on his courser if he is lazy.

As Malta is an epitome of all Europe, and an assemblage of the younger brothers, which are commonly the best of its first families, it is certainly one of the best academies for politeness in this part of the globe; besides, where every one is entitled by law as custom to demand satisfaction for the least breach of it, people are under a necessity of being very exact  
and



and circumspect, both with regard to their words and actions.

All the knights and commanders have much the appearance of gentlemen, and men of the world. We met with no character in extreme. The ridicules and prejudices of every particular nation are by degrees softened and wore off, by the familiar intercourse and collision with each other. It is curious to observe the effect it produces upon the various people that compose this little medley. • The French skip, the German strut, and the Spanish stalk, are all mingled together in such small proportions, that none of them appear extreme; yet every one of these nations still retain something of their original characteristic: It is only the exuberance of it that is wore off, and it is still easy to distinguish the inhabitants of the south and north side of the Pyrenees, as well as those of the east and west side of the Rhine; for though the Parisian has, in a great measure, lost his assuming air, the Spaniard his taciturnity and solemnity, the German his stubbornness and his pride; yet still you see the German, the Frenchman, and the Spaniard: It is only the caricature, that formerly made them ridiculous, that has disappeared.

This institution, which is a strange compound of the military and ecclesiastic, has now subsisted for near seven hundred years; and though, I believe, one of the first-born, has long survived every other child of chivalry. It possesses great riches in most of the catholic countries of Europe; and did so in England too, before the time of Henry VIII. but that capricious tyrant did not chuse that any institution, however antient or respected, should remain in his dominions, that had any doubt of his supremacy and infallibility; he therefore seized on all their possessions, at the same time that he enriched himself by the plunder of the church. It was in vain for them to plead that they were rather a military than an ecclesiastic order,

order, and by their valour had been of great service to Europe, in their wars against the infidels : It was not agreeable to his system ever to hear a reason for any thing ; and no person could possibly be right, that was capable of supposing that the king could be wrong.

Malta, as well as Sicily, was long under the tyranny of the Saracens ; from which they were both delivered about the middle of the eleventh century, by the valour of the Normans : After which time, the fate of Malta commonly depended on that of Sicily, till the Emperor Charles V. about the year 1530, gave it, together with the island of Gozzo, to the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, who at that time had lost the island of Rhodes. In testimony of this concession, the grand master is still obliged, every year, to send a falcon to the king of Sicily, or his viceroy ; and on every new succession, to swear allegiance, and to receive, from the hands of the Sicilian monarch, the investiture of these two islands.

Ever since our arrival here the weather has been perfectly clear and serene, without a cloud in the hemisphere ; and for some time after sun-set, the heavens exhibit a most beautiful appearance, which I don't recollect ever to have observed any where else. The eastern part of the horizon appears of a rich deep purple, and the western is the true yellow glow of Claud Lorrain, that you used to admire so much. The weather, however, is not intollerably hot ; the thermometer stands commonly betwixt 75 and 76. Adieu. We are now preparing for a long voyage, and it is not easy to say from whence I shall write to you next.

Ever yours.

L E T



## L E T T E R XVII.

Agrigentum, June 11th.

**W**E left the port of Malta in a sparono which we hired to convey us to this city.

We coasted along the island, and went to take a view of the north port, its fortifications and lazaretto. All these are very great, and more like the works of a mighty and powerful people, than of so small a state. The mortars cut out of the rock is a tremendous invention! There are about fifty of them, near the different creeks and landing-places round the island. They are directed at the most probable spots where boats would attempt a landing. The mouths of some of these mortars are about six feet wide, and they are said to throw a hundred cantars of cannon-ball or stones. A cantar is, I think, about a hundred pound weight; so that if they do take place, they must make a dreadful havoc amongst a debarkation of boats.

The distance of Malta from Gozzo is not above four or five miles, and the small island of Commino lies betwixt them. The coasts of all the three are bare and barren, but covered over with towers, redoubts, and fortifications of various kinds.

As Gozzo is supposed to be the celebrated island of Calypso, you may believe we expected something very fine; but we were disappointed. It must either be greatly fallen off since the time that she inhabited it, or the archbishop of Cambray, as well as Homer, must have flattered greatly in their painting. We looked, as went along the coast, for the goddess's grotto, but could see nothing that resembled it. Neither could we observe these verdant banks eternally covered with flowers; nor those lofty trees for ever in blossom, that lost their heads in the clouds, and

afforded a shade to the sacred baths of the goddess and her nymphs. We saw, indeed, some nymphs; but as neither Calypso nor Eucharis seemed to be of the number, we paid little attention to them, and I was in no apprehension about my Telemachus: Indeed it would have required an imagination as strong as Don Quixote's to have brought about the metamorphosis.

Finding our hopes frustrated, we ordered our sailors to pull out to sea, and bid adieu to the island of Calypso, concluding, either that our intelligence was false, or that both the island and its inhabitants were greatly changed. We soon found ourselves once more at the mercy of the waves: Night came on, and our rowers began their evening song to the Virgin, and beat time with their oars. Their offering was acceptable, for we had the most delightful weather. We wrapt ourselves up in our cloaks, and slept most comfortably, having provided mattrasses at Malta. By a little after day-break, we found we had got without sight of all the islands, and saw only a part of mount Ætna smoking above the waters. The wind sprung up fair, and by ten o'clock we had sight of the coast of Sicily.

On considering the smallness of our boat, and the great breadth of this passage, we could not help admiring the temerity of these people, who, at all seasons of the year, venture to Sicily in these diminutive vessels; notwithstanding which, it is very seldom that any accident happens: They are so perfectly acquainted with the weather, foretelling, almost to a certainty, every storm, many hours before it comes on. The sailors look upon this passage as one of the most stormy and dangerous in the Mediterranean. It is called the canal of Malta, and is much dreaded by the Levant ships; but indeed, at this season, there is no danger.

We arrived at Sicily a little before sun-set, and landed opposite to Ragusa, and not far from the ruins  
of



of the little Hybla, the third town of that name in the island, distinguished by the epithets of the Great, (near mount Ætna) the Lesser, (near Augusta) and the Little (just by Ragusa). Here we found a beautiful sandy beach, and whilst the servants were employed in dressing our supper, we amused ourselves with bathing and gathering shells, of which there is a considerable variety. We were in expectation of finding the nautilus, for which this island is famous; but in this we did not succeed. However, we picked up some handsome shells, though not equal to those that are brought from the Indies.

After supper, we again launched our bark, and went to sea. The wind was favourable as we could wish. We had our nightly serenade as usual, and the next day, by twelve o'clock, we reached the celebrated port of Agrigentum.

The captain of the port gave us a polite reception, and insisted on accompanying us to the city, which stands near the top of a mountain, four miles distant from the harbour, and about eleven hundred feet above the level of the sea. The road on each side is bordered by a row of exceeding large American aloes; upwards of one-third of them being at present in full blow, and making the most beautiful appearance that can be imagined. The flower-stems of this noble plant are in general betwixt twenty and thirty feet high, (some of them more) and are covered with flowers from top to bottom, which taper regularly, and form a beautiful kind of pyramid, the base or pedestal of which is the fine spreading leaves of the plant. As this is esteemed, in northern countries, one of the greatest curiosities of the vegetable tribe, we were happy at seeing it in so great perfection; much greater, I think, than I had ever seen it before.

With us, I think, it is vulgarly reckoned, (though I believe falsely) that they only flower once in a hun-

dred years. Here I was surprised to be informed, that, at the latest, they always blow the sixth year, but for the most part the fifth.—As the whole substance of the plant is carried into the stem and the flowers, the leaves begin to decay so soon as the blow is completed, and a numerous offspring of young plants are produced round the root of the old one; these are slip'd off, and formed into new plantations, either for hedges or for avenues to their country-houses.

The city of Agrigentum, now called *Girgenti*, is very irregular and ugly; though from a few miles distance at sea, it makes a noble appearance, little inferior to that of Genoa.—As it lies on the slope of the mountain, the houses do not hide one another; but every part of the city is seen.

On our arrival, we found a great falling off indeed; the houses are mean, the streets dirty, crooked, and narrow.—It still contains near twenty thousand people; a dreadful reduction from its antient grandeur, when it was said to hold no less than eight hundred thousand, being the next city to Syracuse in the island.

The Canonico Spoto, from Mr. Hamilton's letter, and from our former acquaintance with him at Naples, gave us a very kind, and a very hospitable reception. He insisted on our being his guests; and we are now in his house, comfortably lodged, and elegantly entertained, which, after our crowded little apartment in the sparonaro, is by no means a disagreeable change.—Farewell.—I shall write to you again soon.

Ever yours.

LET-



## LETTER XVIII.

Agrigentum, June 12th.

WE are just now returned from examining the antiquities of Agrigentum, the most considerable, perhaps, of any in Sicily.

The ruins of the antient city lie about a short mile from the modern one. These, like the ruins of Syracuse, are mostly converted into corn-fields, vineyards, and orchards ; but the remains of the temples here, are infinitely more conspicuous than those of Syracuse. Four of these have stood pretty much in a right line, near the south wall of the city. The first they call the temple of Venus ; almost one half of which still remains. The second is that of Concord : It may be considered as entire, not one column having as yet fallen. It is precisely of the same dimensions and same architecture as that of Venus, which had probably served as the model for it. By the following inscription, found on a large piece of marble, it appears to have been built at the expence of the Lilibitani ; probably after having been defeated by the people of Agrigentum.

CONCORDIÆ AGRIGENTINORUM SACRUM,  
 RESPUBLICA LILIBITANORUM,  
 DEDICANTIBUS M. ATTERIO CANDIDO  
 PROCOS. ET L. CORNELIO MAR-  
 CELLO. Q. P. R. P. R.

These temples are supported by thirteen large fluted Doric columns on each side, and six at each end. All their bases, capitals, entablatures, &c. still remain entire ; and as the architecture is perfectly simple, without any thing affected or studied, the whole strikes the eye at once, and pleases very much. The columns are, indeed, shorter than the common Doric proportions ; and they certainly are not so elegant as some of the antient temples that are to be seen about Rome, and in other places in Italy.

The third temple is that of Hercules, altogether in ruins ; but appears to have been of a much greater size than the former two. We measured some of the broken columns, near seven feet in diameter. It was here that the famous statue of Hercules stood, so much celebrated by Cicero, which the people of Agrigentum defended with such bravery, against Verres, who attempted to seize it. You will find the whole story in his pleadings against that infamous prætor.

There was likewise in this temple a famous picture by Zeuxis. Hercules was represented in his cradle killing the two serpents : Alcmena and Amphitryon having just entered the apartment, were painted with every mark of terror and astonishment. Pliny says, the painter looked upon this piece as invaluable ; and therefore could never be prevailed on to put a price upon it, but gave it as a present to Agrigentum, to be placed in the temple of Hercules. These two great master-pieces have been lost. We thought of them with regret, whilst we trod on these venerable ruins.

Near to this lie the ruins of the enormous temple of Jupiter Olympus, supposed, by the Sicilian authors, to have been the largest in the Heathen world. It is now called *il tempio de' giganti*, or the Giants Temple, as the people cannot conceive, that such masses of rock could ever be put together by the hands of ordinary men. The fragments of columns are indeed enormous, and give us a vast idea of this fabric. It is said to have stood till the year 1100 ; but is now a perfect ruin. Our Cicerones assured us, it was exactly the same dimensions with the church of St. Peter at Rome : But in this they are egregiously mistaken.—St. Peter's being infinitely greater than any thing that ever the Heathen world produced.

There are the remains of many more temples, and other great works ; but these, I think, are the most conspicuous. They shew you that of Vulcan, of Proserpine,



Proserpine, of Castor and Pollux, and a very remarkable one of Juno. This too was enriched by one of the most famous pictures of antiquity, which is celebrated by many of the antient writers.—Zeuxis was determined to excel every thing that had gone before him, and to form a model of human perfection. To this end, he prevailed on all the finest women of Agrigentum, who were even ambitious of the honour, to appear naked before him. Of these he chose five for his models, and moulding all the perfections of these beauties into one, he composed the picture of the goddess. This was ever looked upon as his masterpiece; but was unfortunately burnt when the Carthaginians took Agrigentum.—Many of the citizens retired into this temple as to a place of safety; but as soon as they found the gates attacked by the enemy, they agreed to set fire to it, and chose rather to perish in the flames, than submit to the power of the conquerors. However, neither the destruction of the temple, nor the loss of their lives, has been so much regretted by posterity as the loss of this picture.

The temple of Esculapius (the ruins of which are still to be seen) was not less celebrated for a statue of Apollo. It was taken from them by the Carthaginians, at the same time that the temple of Juno was burnt. It was carried off by the conquerors, and continued the greatest ornament of Carthage for many years, and was at last restored by Scipio, at the final destruction of that city. Some of the Sicilians allege, I believe without any ground, that it was afterwards carried to Rome, and still remains there, the wonder of all ages; known to the whole world under the name of the Apollo of Belvidere, and universally allowed to be the highest pitch of perfection that ever human art has attained to.

I should be very tedious, were I to give you a minute description of every piece of antiquity. Indeed, little or nothing is to be learned from the greatest part

of them. The antient walls of the city are mostly cut out of the rock ; the catacombs and sepulchres are all very great : One of these is worthy of particular notice, because it is mentioned by Polybius, as being opposite to the temple of Hercules, and to have been struck by lightning even in his time. It remains almost entire, and answers the description he gives of it: The inscriptions are so defaced, that we could make nothing of them.

This is the monument of Tero king of Agrigentum, one of the first of the Sicilian tyrants. The great antiquity of it may be gathered from this, that Tero is not only mentioned by Diodorus, Polybius, and the more modern of the antient historians, but likewise by Herodotus, and Pindar, who dedicates two of his Olympic odes to him : So that this monument must be greatly upwards of two thousand years old. It is a kind of pyramid, one of the most durable of all forms.

All these mighty ruins of Agrigentum, and the whole mountain on which it stands, is composed of an immense concretion of sea-shells, run together, and cemented by a kind of sand or gravel, and now become as hard, and perhaps more durable than even marble itself. This stone is white before it has been exposed to the air ; but in the temples, and other ruins, it is become of a very dark brown. I shall bring home some pieces of it for the inspection of the curious. I found these shells on the very summit of the mountain, at least fourteen or fifteen hundred feet above the level of the sea. They are of the commonest kinds, cockles, muscles, oysters, &c.

“ The things we know are neither rich nor rare ;

“ But wonder how the devil they got there.”

POPE.

By what means they have been lifted up to this vast height, and so intimately mixed with the whole substance



stance of the rock, I leave to you and your philosophical friends to determine.—This old battered globe of ours has probably suffered many convulsions that are not recorded in any history.—You have heard of the vast stratum of bones that was lately discovered in Istria and Offero;—part of it runs below rocks of marble that are upwards of forty feet in thickness, and they have not yet been able to ascertain its extent: Something of the same kind has been found in Dalmatia, in the islands of the Archipelago, and lately, I am told, in the rock of Gibraltar.—Now, the deluge recorded in Scripture, will hardly account sufficiently for all the phænomena of this sort that are to be met with, almost in every country in the world.—But I am interrupted by visitors;—which, I think, is a very lucky circumstance, both for you and me; for I was just going to be exceedingly philosophical, and consequently exceedingly dull.—Adieu.

## L E T T E R XIX.

Agrigentum, June 13th.

**T**HE interruption in my last was a deputation from the bishop, to invite us to a great dinner to-morrow at the port; so that we shall know whether this place still deserves the character of luxury it always held amongst the antients: We have great reason to think, from the politeness and attention we have met with, that it has never lost its antient hospitality, for which it was likewise so much celebrated.

Plato, when he visited Sicily, was so much struck with the luxury of Agrigentum, both in their houses and their tables, that a saying of his is still recorded: That they built as if they were never to die, and eat as if they had not an hour to live. It is preserved by Elian, and is just now before me. The words in this author are,

“Agrigentinos ita edificare, ac si perpetuo victuri,  
“ita convivari, ac si postredie morituri forent.”

He

He tells a story by way of illustration, which shews a much greater conformity of manners than one could have expected, betwixt the young nobility amongst the antients, and our own at this day.

He says, that after a great feast, where there were a number of young people of the first fashion, they got all so gloriously drunk, that from their reeling and tumbling upon one another, they imagined they were at sea in a storm, and began to think themselves in the most imminent danger; at last they agreed, that the only way to save their lives was to lighten the ship, and with one accord began to throw the rich furniture out of the windows, to the great edification of the mob below; and did not stop till they had entirely cleared the house of it, which, from this piece of folly, was ever after denominated the *triremes*, or the ship. He says it was one of the principal palaces of the city, and retained this name for ever after. In Dublin, I have been told, there are more than one triremes; and that this frolic, which they call throwing the house out of the window, is by no means uncommon.

At the same time that Agrigentum is abused by the antient authors for its drunkenness, it is as much celebrated for its hospitality; and I believe, it will be found, that this virtue, and this vice, have ever had a sort of sneaking kindness for each other, and have generally gone hand in hand, both in antient and in modern times. The Swiss, the Scotch, and the Irish, who are at present the most drunken people in Europe, are likewise, in all probability, the most hospitable; whereas, in the very sober countries, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, hospitality is a virtue very little known; or indeed any other virtue, except sobriety; which has been produced, probably a good deal from the tyranny of their government, and their dread of the inquisition; for where every person is in fear, lest his real sentiments should be known, it would be very dangerous



rous to unlock his heart ; but in countries where there are neither civil nor ecclesiastical tyrants to lay an embargo on our thoughts, people are under no apprehension lest they should be known.

However, these are not the only reasons. The moral virtues and vices, I am persuaded, very often depend upon natural causes.—The very elevated situation of this city, where the air is exceedingly thin and cold, has probably been one great reason that its inhabitants have become greater drunkards than their neighbours in the valleys.

The same may be said of the three nations I have mentioned ; the greatest part of their countries lying amongst hills and mountains, where the climate renders strong liquors much more necessary ; or at least, much less detrimental, than in low places.—It is not surprising, though it is greatly to be lamented, that this practice, probably begun amongst the mountains, where the air is so keen, has by degrees crept down into the valleys, and has at last become almost epidemical in those countries.

Fazello, after railing at Agrigentum for its drunkenness, adds, that there was no town in the island so celebrated for its hospitality. He says that many of the nobles had servants placed at the gates of the city, to invite all strangers that arrived to their houses. It is in reference to this, probably, that Empedocles says, that even the gates of the city proclaimed a welcome to every stranger. From our experience we are well intitled to say, that the people of Agrigentum still retain this antiquated virtue, so little known in polite countries. To-morrow we shall have a better opportunity of judging whether it is still accompanied by its sister vice.

The accounts that the old authors give of the magnificence of Agrigentum are truly amazing ; though there are none of them, indeed, that proclaim it in stronger terms than the monuments of it that still remain.—

main.—Diodorus says, the great vessels for holding water were commonly of silver, and that their litters and carriages were for the most part of ivory richly adorned. He mentions a vast pond made at an immense expence, full of fish and of water-fowl, that in his time was the great resort of the inhabitants, on their festivals; but he says, that even then (in the age of Augustus) it was going to ruin, requiring too great an expence to keep it up. There is not now the smallest vestige of it remaining: But there is still to be seen a curious spring of water that throws up a kind of oil that floats on its surface, and is made use of by the poor people in many diseases. This is supposed to mark out the place of this celebrated pond; which is recorded by Pliny and Solinus to have been strongly impregnated with this oil.

Diodorus, speaking of the riches of Agrigentum, mentions one of its citizens returning victorious from the Olympic games and entering this city, attended by three hundred chariots, drawn each by four white horses, richly caparisoned; and gives many other instances of their vast profusion and luxury.

These horses, he says, were greatly esteemed all over Greece, for their beauty and swiftness.—Their race is celebrated by many of the antient authors.

“ Arduus inde Agragas ostentat maxima longe  
 “ Moenia, magnanimum quondam generator equorum,”

Says Virgil in the third *Æneid*; and Pliny acquaints us, that those which had been often victorious at the games were not only honoured with burial rites, but that magnificent monuments were built to eternise their memory. This Timeus confirms: He tells us that he saw at Agrigentum several pyramids built as sepulchral monuments to celebrated horses; he adds, that when these animals became old and incapable of farther



ther service, they were always taken care of, and spent the remainder of their lives in ease and plenty.—I could wish that our countrymen would imitate the gratitude and humanity of the Sicilians in this article, at least, the latter part of it. I don't know that our nation can so justly be taxed with cruelty or ingratitude in any other article as in their treatment of horses, the animal that of all others is the most intitled to our care. It is really lamentable, on many of your great roads, to see the finest old hunters, that were once the glory of the chace, condemned, in the decline of life, to the tyranny and brutality of the most cruel oppressors, in whose hands they suffer the most extreme misery, till they at last sink under the grievous task that is assigned them. The sufferings of these noble but unfortunate animals, I have ever looked upon as the most disagreeable circumstance attending our travelling in England, which would otherwise be the pleasantest in the world.—I am called away to see some more antiques, but shall finish this letter to-night, as the post goes off for Italy to-morrow morning.

13th; Afternoon. We have seen a great many old walls and vaults that little or nothing can be made of. They give them names, and pretend to tell you what they were, but as they bear not the least resemblance to these things now, it would be no less idle to believe them than to trouble you with their nonsense. We have indeed seen one thing that has amply repaid us for the trouble we have taken. It is the representation of a boar-hunting in alto relievo, on white marble, and is at least equal, if not superior, to any thing of the kind I have ever met with in Italy. It consists of four different parts, which form the history of this remarkable chace and its consequences.

The first is the preparation for the hunt. There are twelve hunters, with each his lance, and a short hanger under his left arm of a very singular form.

The

The dogs exactly resemble those we call lurchers. The horses are done with great fire and spirit, and are perhaps a better proof of the excellence of the race, than even the testimony of their authors ; for the artist that formed these must certainly have been accustomed to see very fine horses.

The second piece represents the chace.—The third the death of the king, by a fall from his horse.—And the fourth, the despair of the queen and her attendants, on receiving the news. She is represented as falling down in a swoon, and is supported by her women, who are all in tears.

It is executed in the most masterly stile, and is indeed one of the finest remains of antiquity I have ever seen. It is preserved in the great church, which is noted through all Sicily for a remarkable echo ; something in the same stile of our whispering gallery at St. Paul's, though much more difficult to be accounted for.

If one person stands at the west gate, and another places himself on the cornice, at the most distant point of the church, exactly behind the great altar, they can hold a conversation in very low whispers with the utmost distinctness.

For many years this singularity was not generally known, and several of the confessing chairs being placed near the great altar, the wags, who were in the secret, used to take their station at the door of the cathedral, and by this means heard distinctly every word that passed betwixt the confessor and his penitent ; of which, you may believe, they did not fail to make their own use when occasion offered.—The most secret intrigues were discovered, and every woman in Agrigentum changed either her gallant or her confessor. Yet still it was the same.—At last, however, the cause was found out ; the chairs were removed, and other precautions were taken, to prevent the



the discovery of these sacred mysteries ; and a mutual amnesty passed amongst all the offended parties.

Agrigentum, like Syracuse, was long subject to the yoke of tyrants. Fazzello gives some account of their cruelty, but I have no intention of repeating it : One story, however, pleased me ; it is a well known one, but as it is short, you shall have it.

Perillo, a goldsmith, by way of paying court to Phalaris the tyrant, made him a present of a brazen bull, of admirable workmanship ; hollow within, and so contrived that the voice of a person shut up in it, appeared exactly like the bellowing of a real bull. The artist pointed out to the tyrant what an admirable effect this must produce, would he only shut up a few criminals in it, and make a fire under them.

Phalaris, struck with so horrid an idea, and perhaps curious to try the experiment, told the goldsmith that he himself was the only person worthy of animating his bull ; that he must have studied the note that made it roar to the greatest advantage, and that it would be unjust to deprive him of any part of the honour of his invention. Upon which he ordered the goldsmith to be shut up, and made a great fire around the bull, which immediately began to roar, to the admiration and delight of all Agrigentum. Cicero says this bull was carried to Carthage at the taking of Agrigentum ; and was restored again by Scipio after the destruction of that city.

Fazzello adds another story, which is still more to the honour of Phalaris. Two friends, Melanippus and Cariton, had conspired his death. Cariton, in hopes of saving his friend from the danger of the enterprize, determined to execute it alone. However, in his attempt to poignard the tyrant, he was seized by the guards, and immediately put to the most dreadful tortures, to make him confess his accomplice ; these he bore with the utmost fortitude, refusing to make the least discovery ; 'till Melanippus, informed  
of

of the situation of his friend, ran to the tyrant, assuring him that he alone was the guilty person ; that it was entirely by his instigation that Cariton had acted ; and begged that he might be put on the rack in the place of his friend. Phalaris, struck with such heroism, pardoned them both.

Notwithstanding this generous action, he was in many respects a barbarous tyrant. Fazzello gives the following account of his death, with which I shall conclude this letter, for I am monstrously tired, and, I dare say, so are you. Zeno, the philosopher, came to Agrigentum, and being admitted into the presence of the tyrant, advised him, for his own comfort as well as that of his subjects, to resign his power, and to lead a private life. Phalaris did not relish these philosophical sentiments ; and suspecting Zeno to be in a conspiracy with some of his subjects, ordered him to be put to the torture in presence of the citizens of Agrigentum.

Zeno immediately began to reproach them with cowardice and pusillanimity in submitting tamely to the yoke of so worthless a tyrant ; and in a short time raised such a flame, that they defeated the guards, and stoned Phalaris to death.—I dare say you are glad they did it so quickly.—Well, I shall not write such long letters for the future ; for I assure you it is at least as troublesome to the writer as the reader. Adieu. We shall sail to-morrow or next morning for Trapani, from whence you may expect to hear from me. We are now going out to examine more antique walls, but I shall not trouble you with them.

Farewell ; ever yours,

P. B.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



t  
o  
f  
  
o  
e  
d  
y  
g  
is  
e  
m  
re  
ut